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IRONICAL TALES

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IRONICAL TALES

By LAURENCE HOUSMAN

San Diego
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IRONICAL TALES

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IRONICAL TALES

I: A Blind World

TO be a God, and to be uncreative, is to be lonely. One of the Gods, finding himself so, started to create a little world.

As he explained to the other Gods, when they came to ask what he was doing, he wanted to "see himself." He could think to himself, talk to himself, feel himself, even smell himself; but he could not quite see himself. Just where he wanted to see himself most, his power of vision ended.

And so, with all the self-expression at his command, he began to make his little world. He put a lot of thought into it, a lot of feeling, and a lot of care—which gradually became love; and, as these virtues went out of him and became embodied in the work of his hands, he feasted his eyes, and was satisfied.

But it was not a satisfaction that stood still: it moved, grew, and progressed—that was the nature of it. And at last, out of its motions,

A Blind World

came something that responded to the care he had spent on it, something which grew aware of him—stretched out its queer little feelers of hands trying to touch him, lifted up its voice with interrogation: “God, where are you?” it cried. Here at last was his world giving him back in echo a kind of image or reflex of himself and his own needs. He stopped, and rubbed his hands: rested, and was highly delighted.

“God, where are you?” called the little creature at his feet.

“I am here,” answered the God: “I am looking after you. Do not be afraid!”

“Looking? What is that?” inquired the manikin.

“Seeing—seeing everything.”

The little creature stretched up its hands in supplication. “Mayn’t I see, too?”

And suddenly the God discovered that, though in all other ways he had shared with man those gifts which he possessed, he had not shared the gift of sight, the power of seeing everything. He had been too busy feasting his eyes—seeing everything for himself at last

A Blind World

—to let any virtue go out of *them*; and so, without quite intending it, he had made a blind world.

Having done so, he felt that he must justify himself. “No, no,” he said; “seeing would not be good for you. You would see too much. Be content! I have made you a beautiful world: live in it, and be happy; and I will look after you.”

“How do I know that it *is* beautiful,” queried the manikin, “if you don’t let me see?”

“Because I tell you so,” answered the God. “Everything I say is true: and if I tell you the truth, what more do you want?”

“I want to see!” said the manikin, sticking to his point. Failing to get it, he became very unhappy. Though the God petted and was kind to him, he could not be at rest.

This troubled the God a great deal; for here was something he had not intended. The thing that he had made had become restless, not to be satisfied by merely standing still. Yes; it had become like himself. And then he suddenly discovered, with a kind of shock, that he could not give his manikin eyes to see—progressive

A Blind World

and independent eyes, that is to say: eyes with the power to search out and know everything—unless he gave up his own.

“If I give you the eyes you ask for,” he said, “I shall no longer be able to watch and take care of you. You will become as Gods, having a will of your own.”

“Give me eyes!” cried the manikin. “I don’t want you to watch and care for me: I want to watch and care for myself. Give me eyes!”

The God’s eyes filled with tears when he heard his manikin say that. And whether he was a kind or a cruel God then, who shall say?

“O beautiful world that I have made,” said the God, “when shall I see you again?” And so saying, he took out his eyes, with the tears still in them, and giving them to his manikin said: “Now see, and be satisfied, having become as God. And when you are satisfied with all that you see, then come back and tell me what you think of this beautiful world that I have made.”

Ever since that day the God sits blind, listening and waiting for his manikin to return

A Blind World

satisfied, and bring him news of his beautiful world.

But the manikin remains unsatisfied: for in his eyes are the God's tears. And the tears of a God never dry.

II: The Perfect One

MANY ages ago there lived in Persia a certain teacher and philosopher named Sabbah who seemed as a shining light to all who looked on him. His courtesy and dignity, his wisdom and humility, his imperturbability of temper, and his charity to all, won for him many followers; and among these there grew toward him so great a devotion that they could see in him nothing amiss. This, they said, was the perfect man whom all the world had been looking for. And because they found no flaw in his character and perceived no limitation in his wisdom, so far as things human were concerned, they called him "the perfect one," and fixing upon him the blind eye of imitation, but shedding upon him the eye of understanding, they sat daily at his feet and hearkened to his sayings; they spoke as he spoke and did as he did, hoping thereby to come in time to a like perfection.

So when, in the contemplation of deep things, the perfect one combed his beard with

The Perfect One

his fingers, they (such as had them) combed theirs, and those who had not, made combings in the air where presently their beards would be. And when he ate they ate, and when he fasted they fasted, and when he spat they spat, so as to be one with him in all things appertaining to conduct. And they were happy in these things, and thought by discipline to come presently to the perfection wherein he seemed perfect.

So when, his hours of teaching being over (for he sat daily in the mosque and taught all that would hear him), he rose to return to his own house, those that doted on his example would rise and follow him; and where he trod they trod, and if he stayed to look on a piece of merchandise, or to handle a fabric and ask the price of it, they also would stay and look and handle and inquire. And because of these things they were a nuisance to the merchants, and the procession of the perfect one was imperfectly welcomed in the bazaars of that city. So presently the merchants would request the perfect one to go by other ways if he wished not to buy, but to go their way when buying was

The Perfect One

his intention; for when he bought, then those that followed him bought also.

Now, every day when the perfect one reached his house thus accompanied and attended, he went in and shut the door, and they saw no more of him; and going sadly to their own homes, they wondered and questioned among themselves what he did when the door was shut, so that they also might do likewise, and by that much be nearer to perfection.

And this grew to be so great a debate among them that at last one, greatly daring, making himself spokesman for the rest, said:

“O Perfect One, when you go into your house and shut your door, so that we see no more of you, what is it that you do then? Let us know, that we also may do it and be perfect, as you are.”

And the perfect one answered:

“I do many things. If I told you them all, you would not remember.”

“Yet you may tell us the first thing,” said he who spoke for the rest.

“The first thing?” said Sabbah; and musingly he combed his beard with his fingers, while all the rest did likewise. “The first

The Perfect One

thing that I do is to stand on my head and stick out my tongue and twiddle my toes, and I find great joy in it."

So that day when all his followers had parted from him and returned each to their own houses, they stood on their heads and stuck out their tongues and twiddled their toes, and found great joy in it.

"Now we be growing perfect," said they.

But the next day one of his followers said to him:

"O Perfect One, why do you do this thing? For though we find joy in it, we know not the celestial reason or the correspondency of it."

And Sabbah answered:

"I will tell you first what I do; I will tell you the reasons afterward."

So they said to him:

"O Perfect One, what is the next thing that you do?"

And Sabbah said:

"The next thing that I do? I tell my wife to beat me till I cry out for mercy."

So when his followers returned to their houses that day and had finished their first exercise in perfection, they told their wives to

The Perfect One

beat them till they cried out for mercy. And their wives did so.

The next day, a little crestfallen and sad, his followers came back to him, and one of them said:

“O Perfect One, after your wife has begun beating you, *when* do you cry out for mercy? There is a difference of opinion among us, and truly it matters.”

Sabbah answered:

“I do not cry out for mercy.”

At this answer they all looked much astonished and very sorry for themselves, and one who had come that day looking more crestfallen than the rest said:

“But I, Perfect One, have ten wives!”

Sabbah smiled on him.

“I have none,” said Sabbah.

His followers sat and looked at him for a while in silence, then said one:

“O Perfect One, why have you done this?”

And the perfect one answered:

“When I go into my house and shut my door, then it is for the relief of being alone and quit of the mockery wherewith you mock me, pretending that I am perfect. It is for that, and

The Perfect One

to realise the more fully my own imperfection, that I stand on my head and twiddle my toes and stick out my tongue. Then I know that I am a fool. And that is the celestial reason and the correspondency which make me find joy in it.

“Then it is, because I know I am a fool, that I tell my wife to beat me until I cry out for mercy. And truly—and this shall be my last answer—the reason that I have no wife is because I am a wise man.”

Then the perfect one arose from his place and went home, according to his custom; nor did any of his followers that time bear him company. But they gazed after him with the open eye of understanding, and, plucking out the blind eye of imitation, cast it from them, and went home full of thought how best to solve the domestic problem which there awaited them.

“Now I am at peace,” said the perfect one, shutting his door.

III: Educating Our Masters; or the Mission of Man

TWO Gods sat back to back, each forming a world of his own, shaping it to his heart's desire, making plans about it, devising rules for its future. The name of the one God was "Law," and the name of the other was "Order."

Law had just finished. He gave a final touch; then, with a deft spin, sent his world twirling into space. "There! I've done," he said. Order a few moments later did the same. "So have I," he remarked. Then, turning his head to look at the other's handiwork, he inquired: "Now you've made it, what are you going to do with it?"

"Nothing," said Law; "I shall just sit and watch it grow."

"That seems a dull sort of game for a God to play," said Order.

"Not at all; it will be very interesting. It will teach me a lot of things I don't yet know."

"So you are going to let your world teach

Educating Our Masters

you, are you?" said Order, scornfully. "That's not *my* way. I'm going to teach *it*."

As he spoke, he gave his little world a kick to right and to left. "I'll make it know who's master while I'm here!" he said, and watched with satisfaction how, at the stroke of his foot, it bounded this way and that with redoubled speed.

"Mine will teach itself," said Law. "I shall know much more about it if I let it alone."

"I dare say you will," replied Order, "but it won't be yours."

"No? Perhaps not," admitted Law. "That's what I want to find out."

"If I couldn't make my world be what I wanted it to be, I wouldn't have one," said Order. As he spoke he gave his busy little planet another kick, and laughed to see how it responded to the stroke. "That's my world, right enough!" he said.

And so, quite unbeknown to themselves, that is how the history of those two worlds started; and what happened in each of them was the result. Law, having devised for his a system of cause and effect, sat and watched the working out of it with an interest that never failed.

Educating Our Masters

Order, having determined that his world must be as he wished it to be, dragooned it to his heart's content with an interest which also never failed.

And so for a few millions of years, the two worlds continued to spin—live, move, have their being in all sorts of microscopic forms of life, which went each its own way, only modified in the one case by the ever-advancing law of cause and effect; in the other by the rapacious interference of the One Above, who was determined that his world should be as he wished it to be.

Order's temper became chronically bad; he was always pulling at strings which broke in his hand; and though he sent fire, and tempest, and flood, and earthquake, and pestilence to teach his creatures how they ought to behave, they still went on being something which he did not quite wish them to be.

One day he said to Law: "How's your world getting on? Mine is going to the Devil."

"The Devil?" inquired Law. "That's something new."

"Yes; I've had to invent one, so as to keep them in order."

Educating Our Masters

"In order? To keep them yours, you mean?"

"Well, I suppose I do. But it doesn't keep them in very good order, you know."

"They can't possibly be better than you, can they?" said Law reflectively.

"They'd better not try!" said Order. "What about yours?"

"Oh, mine?" said Law, and then he stopped to think. "It's very interesting," he went on at last, "but rather disappointing. Cause and effect, you see, occasionally have rather unexpected results, which my world doesn't understand—flood, and famine, and fire, and pestilence, and earthquake. And when those things happen they think it's me; they think it's because I'm angry with them, and that I can prevent it. And so they have started praying to me, and making what they call 'sacrifices' hoping in that way to get me not to do these things. Of course it's very interesting; but it's really rather horrible; it gives me such a bad character; makes me almost feel that my world doesn't really belong to me, but to you. For now it's you they are worshipping."

Order laughed. "So your world is teaching

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you that, is it?" he said. "Well, if it makes you become a real God like me, it will have done something."

"But I don't want to be like you," said Law.

"You'll have to be in the end," answered Order; "else, as a God, you'll simply cease to exist."

Law sat thinking deeply, while for a few thousand more years the two worlds span on. Then he said:

"And your world—how is that getting on? Does it satisfy you?"

Order was apparently in a very bad temper. "It's you!" he exclaimed angrily; "you've been getting at my world and spoiling it with your nasty infectious ideas. I wish you'd go farther away!"

"But I've done nothing!" protested Law. "I haven't touched your silly world!"

"You have, with your ideas! They've simply left off believing in me! Now, when I send earthquakes and pestilence and famine to make them behave, they say it's not me at all; it's only what they call "Nature"—the law of cause and effect. I have a good mind to smash

Educating Our Masters

them all up, every one of them. 'They'd know then!'"

"Would they? Why?" inquired Law. "You have been smashing them up by sections ever since you made them, until your smashings have become such a habit that they think it's only Nature. You've overdone it, my friend. Try letting them off for a bit; then perhaps they'd come to believe as my world does, that when bad things happen unexpectedly it isn't nature, but you."

Order got a flash of inspiration. "Look here," he said, "let's exchange worlds! Then we shall each have the one that believes as we want it to believe."

Law was rather reluctant. "Let you have my world?" Then he thought a bit, and said: "Yes—that would be very interesting. But only for a little time. I'm rather fond of my world, even though it misunderstands me."

"Let's say a thousand years."

"Very well; and we'll call it the millenium."

So for a thousand years they exchanged worlds. "This is very interesting," said Law, as he took the other over. "Your world is ex-

actly like mine, and the people in it behave in exactly the same way, though they have left off believing in you. What about mine?"

"I haven't sampled it yet," replied Order, "but I will." So he set to work with his visitations of earthquake, fire, and pestilence; and the thousand years went by.

And what had happened by that time was simply this. Belief had swung like a pendulum to the other end of its tether: and Law, after a thousand years of scrupulous non-intervention, had charge of a world which had come once more to believe in the dispensations of Providence: and Order, in spite of his catastrophical teachings and corrections, had under him a world whose faith had slipped away from him once more; regarding all these things as Nature's law of cause and effect.

"It's very provoking!" exclaimed Order, "very!"

"It's very interesting," said Law.

"But these worlds that we have made are not ours!" cried Order.

"Perhaps that is what we had to learn," said Law, "—that though a God can create he cannot control."

Educating Our Masters

"Cannot control?" exclaimed Order furiously; "what of that?" And, so saying, he smashed utterly to pieces the world which had ceased to believe in him.

"That was *my* world!" said Law, a little sadly. "And now my world has won. For even as it perished it thought that the catastrophe was nothing but the result of natural cause and effect. And after all isn't it true, seeing that you have a naturally bad temper?"

Order's answer to that was to smash up his own world also.

"Well," said Law, "we've both had a lesson. Now, shall we begin again?"

IV: Blind Knowledge

A SAINT, wishing to live the perfect life, started to pray. He prayed for nothing but to know God; and at this prayer continued without intermission some fifty years. All that time he prayed, and God never once heard him.

Now, it happened about that time, when fifty years had passed, that a poor woman died whose life had been no better than it should be. One day, looking through the window of his oratory, she had seen the saint upon his knees; and beholding him so rapt from the world, so untormented by the things which tormented her, she had conceived a great love for him, different in kind from all the other loves which had emptied her life of happiness. After that it became her rest and consolation to look in at him every day. "If only," she said to herself, "he would turn and take notice that I exist, and pray for me—then I might cease to be a sinner."

But he never did. Occupied in praying that

Blind Knowledge

he might know God, he knew nothing of his fellow-men, and cared less. Pounding the steep ascent to Heaven, he left the pence lying behind him.

When the woman died, expecting to be in Hell, she found instead that her thread of a soul had become joined, entangled, nay, almost woven into a piece with the outer hem of God's raiment. There it hung, very much afraid, fearing that it was all a mistake, touching His Feet, saying nothing.

God became aware of her; He took her up—drew her out as it were—without in any way disentangling her from the weft, and examined her. Searched by the All-seeing Eye, she told her story; and thus it was, for the first time, that God heard tell of the Saint. “He never spoke to me,” she said, “never looked at me, did not know that I existed.”

“Nor did I know it of him,” replied God.

“He was always praying to you,” she said.

“I never heard him. Indeed, I only know of him through you.”

“Then how did you know of *me*?” she asked.

“Through your love for him.”

Contented, she returned to her place at God's

Blind Knowledge

Feet, while He, descending through great depths and by difficult ways, sought out the Saint.

The Saint, as always, was babbling his prayer, when the Light Celestial shone in on him.

"What is that you are saying?" inquired the Divine Presence.

The Saint, hearing a voice replied, "I am praying that I may know God."

"He doesn't understand a word of it."

"How do you know? You are not God."

"Why am I not God?"

"Because you have a voice which I can hear with my ears; and you have a light which I can see with my eyes. But these are the deceptions of the senses."

"I perceive," said God, "that you are praying to know the unknowable. But it is only by praying through that which you know that you can come nearer to God."

"You must be the Devil," said the Saint, "for you are talking heresy."

"I always do," said God, "it is only so that I can make men understand me. Here is heresy. for you, my son, which you have been avoiding

Blind Knowledge

all your life, therefore have lost your way. Listen!

“Without your senses you cannot love; and without Love you cannot know God. I sent Love into the world that men might know it, and that through it they might know me, and I them. For it is only through Love that God and man can know each other. I only know of you, through a soul that loved you. Had you loved her, or some other, I should have known you sooner.”

By these words the Saint was first amazed, then troubled, then humbled. “Who was she, Lord?” he asked.

“A sinner, one of many. You did not know she existed, nor did you care. But she knew that you existed; and *she* cared.

“And that is how I have come to know, my son, that you are anything—except a foolish noise!”

V: Joy in Heaven

THE old clown, past his work and against doctor's orders, was performing his last stunt. Thousands watched and applauded. Light-headed, exhausted, he turned and tumbled like one inspired.

Death held up the hoop of strained paper, through which he could not see the change which was there awaiting him: held it up over his head, for a higher leap than he had ever leapt before. Gathering his failing faculties for a last effort up he went with a spin, twizzled through it, and entered Heaven.

The sudden and unexpected sight of that imperishable world was too much for him. "O Hell!" he cried, and whisked back again.



From the murmurous pity of the spectators they carried him behind the scenes. There he lay with dazed eyes, gasping feebly, trying to explain:

Joy in Heaven

"Jumped farther than I knew, that time!" he whispered painfully. "Got into the wrong hole. How?—I don't know. . . . Queer place! . . . Took a look, and came out again."

"What was queer about it?" inquired Harlequin, in a friendly attempt to make conversation for a mind that wandered.

"Nothing—except me. Queer place for *me*, I meant. I was the only queer thing in it." His face grew haggard with the horror of that strange loneliness wherein he had found himself.

"They all looked at me—and nobody laughed!" he said.

"Maybe you didn't give them time," said Harlequin. "People are slow sometimes to see a joke."

"But they saw *me*," said the old clown. "They saw *me*, and they didn't laugh."

He shuddered both at the memory, and at the prospect. "Just fancy!" he whispered: "suppose! . . . Wouldn't it be—Hell?"

But that instinctive revulsion from the inevitable was useless. Though, for a moment, the shock of it had sent him back, life could no longer contain him. And so presently en-

Joy in Heaven

tered, with mission to fulfil (it being against all rules for any that once set foot in Heaven to drop out again), and encompassed about in a soft glow of delicately reflected lights, not Death this time, but his own Guardian Angel.

In his hand he carried a large luminous hoop, with a hole in the middle just big enough for a man's head. Waving it with inviting gesture before the dying eyes, "You must come back," said the angel.

The familiar hoop-like shape with its strange radiance attracted the old clown's curiosity. "What's that?" he inquired feebly.

"That is your halo, which has been waiting for you," said the angel. "Put it on!"

Apprehensively, but meekly, the old clown obeyed. Then without any further struggle, led gently by the hand, he passed elsewhere.

As they entered the celestial regions, the angel, his mission accomplished, making respectful obeisance to the glorious company there expectantly assembled, said, merely by way of explanation, "Here we are again!"

And suddenly, at that familiar word, life, courage, spirit, and confidence came back into the old clown with a rush. It seemed to him

Joy in Heaven

that he was in his old world again: that life had a meaning still. Inspiration tingled from his head to his heels; joy came to them like wings.

Taking off his halo, he tumbled through it, looping the loop as only a clown can—not once nor twice only, but twenty, thirty times. And as he did so—to its eternal credit be it spoken—how Heaven laughed!

VI: The Real Temptation of St. Anthony

HAVE you considered our servant Anthony?" inquired St. Michael one day, as he and the Devil argued together over the merits of their respective systems. "There you have a man who by no manner of means can be tempted!"

"I *will* consider him," said the Devil grimly; and he made a note of it. "You think the proposition a safe one?"

"Safe he is," replied Michael. "The Eye of Heaven shines through him—a light for all the world, that shall go down the ages."

"Fine light he makes of it!" growled the Devil, "hidden under a bushel in the wilderness! I will go look at him; for his candle, I think, needs snuffing!"

The Devil went. He came, a gliding and seductive presence, and sat himself down at the door of the Saint's cave.

For three days he plied his task, warbling warm invitations to one who seemed utterly

The Real Temptation of St. Anthony

oblivious to all externals. Anthony, within, howled his regular litany, and plied no more than the usual scourge. The vision of a fair and forward dame, sitting at his doorway with only one eye uncovered, failed in any way to disturb him.

"Anthony!" cried the Devil, finally out of patience, "I'm tempting you!"

Anthony gave a spiritual smirk. "It is what I love above all things," said he, and continued to grovel at his devotions.

The Devil had discovered then the thin end of the holy man's character, whose pride was not fleshly, but spiritual. He went away and returned presently in the guise of a penitent, a woman who had been a great sinner in the most accepted sense of the word. Under an adjacent rock the female semblance took up her station, and, smocked and girdled in nothing but her own hair, once golden but now grizzled and tangled, began causing the caverns to resound with the noise of her lamentations.

The Saint could hear the stones thudding upon her flesh, and the swish of the scourge wherewith she lashed nature out of her.

"Oh, my God, what sanctity!" he cried; and,

The Real Temptation of St. Anthony

not to be outdone, plunged emulously into yet fiercer austerities. Blow for blow he played echo to the frenzied anchorite who had come to invade his solitude.

"Thou sinful beast!" he cried to his own body betwixt every flagellation, "thou slug, thou lump of dust, thou dung-heap, thou doorway into hell, shall another make louder lamentation for sin than thou, or be more pricked, tortured, goaded and abased than thou art?"

Presently his body broke down under the burden he forced upon it. For days he lay, with lacerated back uppermost, unable to move, and heard all the while the penitent hard by, laying fierce siege to her flesh with all the artillery under heaven. In the night-watches she cried out on herself as the greatest of sinners. "Even yon poor miserable hermit," Anthony heard her say, "is, in comparison with me, an upright and a holy man. He shines, and is not tempted."

"Oh, ye Heavens!" cried the Saint, "after all my nights and days of agony, am I to be thus mocked and belittled? Shall any other soul conceive itself more vile and miserable than I?" He caught up a stone wherewith to cudgel himself afresh, but too weak to lift, he let it go.

The Real Temptation of St. Anthony

In the practice of austerity and discipline, for the first time he found himself beaten. "This," he marvelled to himself, "is the seventeenth night that she has not slept. Alas! I have to allow myself one night in seven. How horrible a sinner must this woman have been, to be able now to endure such extremes of penance!"

A mighty longing to see her once more began to take hold of him. Since she had passed his door, a foul and grizzled object, on her way to the cavern she now occupied, he had not set eyes on her; only his ears had been stretched to hearken.

Upon the next night she stopped in mid-shriek; and silence, for the first time since her advent, resumed its sway over those bleak solitudes.

Presently he saw figures that seemed to be angels hastening by in the direction of her cave. "Is she dead?" he inquired of them.

The one that replied bore in his hands a golden comb. "No, she is sleeping," he answered. "At the bidding of Heaven we go to attend on her."

The lust of the eye grew strong again in Anthony. To gain sight of this holy woman

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surrounded by angelic visitants, he crawled upon his belly with infinite pains to a point from which he could view the interior of the cavern. There lay the recluse in a deep sleep, and around her angels (for so they seemed), with wings reverently folded across their eyes, washed and combed her, applying healing unguents to her body from head to foot.

Under their handling her flesh became as snow, her hair rippled into living gold, her lips were like roses in fresh bud, fed by the dews of Heaven; and after they had departed a light shone over the place where she lay, and out of it came a wonderful fragrance, making the air of the desert seem like a garden to the senses.

Anthony shut his eyes and crawled back to his cave. On the morrow he heard the penitent as loud as ever in outcry against her own unworthiness, and shuddered to hear the thumping of the stones, and the swish of the scourge; for the thought of that fair vision he had seen of flesh graced and beautified, sent tremors of weakness through his blood.

So soon as twilight was enough to cover him, he crept forth once more, and beheld—oh, marvellous grace!—only a woman, gnarled and

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grizzled, clouting her bruised hide with the sharpest crags she could lay hands on.

That night Anthony, by dint of much crawling from place to place, had rolled himself in a score of thorn-bushes, and, returning to his own cave about dawn, there lay, like an exhausted porcupine, hard upon death's door.

To him ere close of day came one in likeness to a neighbouring hermit of renowned sanctity, drawn apparently by angelic summons, to hear his last confession and give him absolution for his sins. Who, beholding him thus prostrate and covered with wounds of his own making, said, "My son, thou art in danger of deadly sin. Spiritual pride is eating thee up, and will shortly have full hold on thee. Refrain thy hand for a while, and seek humility in a more moderate affliction of that body, from which, without regard for the will of Heaven, thou art seeking to rid thyself."

And for proof and penance the seeming hermit bade him, on spiritual obedience and as he hoped to win pardon at the last, to refrain for seven days from his disciplinary desires, and during that time neither cut himself with stones or lancets, nor use the scourge, nor roll himself

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in a thorn-bush, nor be scorched in the sun by day, nor stand neck-deep in a freezing well by night; but in all things to behave himself orderly, giving his too-much abused body rest and ease.

This to Anthony was the most trying penance that had ever been put on him; and so soon as he was well started thereon, the loud austerities of the penitent hard by became to him as the noise of running water to a thirsty man.

For three days he endured, suffering a discomfort of soul that had never before been his, jealously craving to outdo those pious wallowings which each day brought to a greater pitch of perfection.

One night, looking forth from his cave by moonlight, he beheld the penitent rolling herself in a thorn-bush. All fresh her body seemed then from the miraculous ministry which came to it in slumber. For her flesh was like snow, and her hair living gold, and a very madness of martyrdom was upon her as she spun herself round and about, this way and that, a cocoon of silken tresses and briers intermixed.

Strong spiritual gluttony took hold of Anthony; from temptation of the eye came emu-

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lous desire. Forgetting his penance and the vow of abstinence that was on him, he ran to the nearest clump of cactus and there grovelled exceedingly, rolling over and over amid its prickles, as a young horse when it returns gloriously to grass.

“Behold a ram caught in a thicket!” grunted the Devil, full of satisfaction at that sight: and without another roll to his sham femininity he got himself up from his thorn-bed and trotted away, with its spines quilling him like a porcupine from horn to tail.

He was yet in that state when, on his way home, St. Michael met him, and, beholding him thus pointedly accoutred, asked what the Devil he had been up to.

Said the Devil, ruefully triumphant, “Tempting Anthony, by a road you had not reckoned on. Though I unsexed myself in the process, example I set; and he followed it.”

“What!” cried Michael, aghast, “hast thou seduced him in the flesh?”

“And in the spirit also,” said the Devil. “He has now as many of my thorns in his flesh as I of his in mine. Seduction you may call it; yet was the consent mutual and both tarred with

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the same brush, for this time at any rate. If I look not the very image of an holy fool, call him sinless! Yes, I tell thee, it is true: I work hard for my living, and going the full hog, do play the game at any rate. Love of virtue breeds in thee a less devotion than pure love of sport breeds in me. Nay, if austerity laid but the breadth of a finger on thy pink-and-white cherubimity, thou would'st cry out for balsams and bandages. Whilst I—!" He pointed to himself, all spine.

"To what dost thou challenge me?" inquired Michael, for he saw the other fretting for a bout, and was well-minded to give him his fling.

"Why!" cried the Devil, "thou gull, thou chicken-heart, thou liver-wing, thou bunch of swan's down, thou piece of pelican's plucking without pluck, wilt thou lie down here in this thorn-bush and roll for the love of God, as I will do for hate of Him?"

Down went the Devil and rolled.

"'Tis a pretty game," quoth Michael, "never had I better will in the world than to do likewise!"

And therewith the downy one took his turn,

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and covering himself with his wings, lay down among the thorns and rolled.

The Devil got up to watch the operation.

“Nay! thou dumpling of deceit,” cried he, “that is not fair! So sheltered by thine own wings, it is but a feather-bed, stuffed with self-worship, on which thou rollest!”

“A feather-bed as thou sayest!” replied Michael. “Given feathers, shall I not flock with them? Having wings, may I not close them? For my wings are obedience to the word of God: clad in them I am without hurt or fear of what flesh can do unto me. Thus in me is fulfilled that saying of the psalmist concerning the joy which Saints have in their beds!”

“But I, too,” said the Devil, “obey the word of God, running in the groove that He hath set for me. Where, then, do my feathers come in?”

“Thy feathers,” said Michael, “have returned to thee like curses, because with thine own tail thy body goes tarred; and tar and feathers—so I have heard it reported—go not so comfortably together as most things. So when, for the tempting of Saints, vice takes to

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itself the semblance of virtue, small is the comfort it can bring thee. See, then, and lay to heart this lesson!"

The Devil grunted, as he sat picking out the thorns. "Yet did I succeed in tempting Anthony," he remarked with proper pride.

"Even as did he," replied Michael, "tempt thee to some of those cudgellings thy carcass hath so richly merited. And as that affliction, wrought by his piety, brings thee no nearer Heaven, neither has his, by the invention of thy malice, brought him a whit nearer to Hell."

"Yet among men when this becomes known," said the Devil, "it shall diminish his lustre, and make less the legend of his sanctity."

"Not so," said Michael; "for the spirit which moves the chroniclers of Saints has less in it of truth than of piety; and I doubt but thou wilt have to wait long to find thy success recorded for thee in Christian legend."

"It can wait," said the Devil, "for I have a nose that a day will yet come (in the twentieth century, or thereabouts) when saintly legends will be less trusted than nowadays. Then shall I find an instrument to my hand, and a pen to my purpose; and from mountains of laborious

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lies the ridiculous mouse, Truth, will at last be born."

"If the world ever ceases to believe what is good for it," said Michael, "it will be lost past hope, and the truth will not matter."

And sure enough, now that the Devil's prophecy has made good, who cares? For what matters to this truth-dodging world the real temptation of St. Anthony?

VII: The Turn of the Worm

THERE was once a certain man who, after having spent a disordered youth, quitted the unruly wills and affections of early life to become continent and holy in his living.

His body, feeling that it had changed owners for the worse, showed every symptom of discontent, endeavouring to unseat the controller and abnegator of its former pleasures. But the whole man, hardening in saintly obstinacy, held with a firm hand the unsubjugated flesh, and for its resistance dealt out to it many harsh severities.

Now he, indeed though stern and austere in practice, was a man of pleasant wit and subtle speech; and many times he would argue for persuading his body to live peaceably under the barer conditions now imposed on it. "Why, thou rogue!" said he, as he laid on the lash circumspectly and thoroughly, "thirty years have I been in thy bonds and done thy bidding. Wilt thou not now do mine?"

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"What I did in the old days," answered his body, "was ever done with thy consent. Yea, I was a faithful slave to thy whims at all hours. Dost thou not, Master, remember that night when with only a shirt to cover thee—"

"I remember well," answered the Saint, "how thou didst ever use my consent as a spring-board to leap from; and, if I gave thee an inch, wouldst consider thyself moderate for taking but an ell! So, to be even with thee, since thou again askest me for ells, I will give thee an inch of my own measuring. Have I not justice?"

"Give me my head some time when thou hast done adding it with thy cudgellings!" answered his body, "and I will think of it." So after that there was truce between them for a time.

"Why, body!" said the Saint presently, "thou art become a reasonable being." Truly, Master," said the body, "looking up to thee and thy great example, I begin to be ready for the seventh Heaven!"

"Wouldst thou teach me pride, thou false parasite?" cried the Saint, and began again to lay on stripes, so that his body howled for mercy.

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Presently the disciplined body broke silence again, and said, "Master, let me not speak otherwise than humbly, for surely I am but a fool! It is well, when I go wrong, that thou shouldst chastise me; but if I see *thee* going wrong, how am I to call thee back?"

"Truly," said the Saint, "thou hast but to speak, and I shall hear."

"Nay!" answered the body, "for when of late I have thrown back to thee the bad meats with which thou didst turn my stomach, thou knowest what blows I have got for that plain-speaking! How may I speak, then, with impunity?"

"Nay, I said not with impunity," answered the Saint. "But speak, and I will beat thee, to thrash out what is false; then, if thou hast truth to utter, speak again and I will hear thee!"

Then the body said, "If that be so, thrash me first, and I will speak after; for now I have something to say that will outlive all thy flailings and cudgellings."

So the Saint did as the other required; and his body took it all like a lamb, uttering no sound of complaint; but when all was over sat up and spoke boldly.

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"I am thine ass," it said, "whom thou hast smitten these three years according to thine own pleasure. Yet, so smiting, so eaten up art thou with malice and self-righteousness, thou hast never once smitten thyself! Nay, thou pampered soul, how thou art puffed up with trampling upon me, a poor body, to the exaltation of thine own spiritual pride! First I rebelled, hoping to prick thy conscience to a sense of wrong; but now, since I have been meek, thou art the more filled with vanity!"

The Saint answered, "If this be true, what wouldst thou have me do to remedy it?"

"Thou art headstrong," said his body: "and choosing thy way, dost discipline me to thine own liking. Go, then, where thou must give up thine own will, and others have theirs of thee, giving thee blows that are not set down in thine own calendar. So, serving hard masters, thou mayst learn hereafter to have some pity on me."

"Thou ape," cried the Saint, "if thou art not making a mock of me, I discern dimly a truth in thy words! How, then, am I to do this thing? Teach me, and I will follow."

"Go," replied the body, "and carry that word of truth wherewith thou causest thy tongue to

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wag into foreign lands, where men beat and ill-use the preachers of the Gospel. And when they put stripes on thee against thy will, see if thou be not a little sorry for thy poor body! Now beat me for what I have said! Yet does not Scripture declare, 'Thou shalt not muzzle the ass that treadeth on thy corns'?"

"Thou hast spoken wisely, ass," answered the Saint; "we will go and do as thou hast said. Truly thou art become a very companion to my soul."

So the body held its peace and lay low, saying no other word; and they took ship and departed to other lands, so that they might preach to savage ears things which they wished not to hear, and share affliction in a good cause.

The zeal of the Saint had so eaten him up, that he chose for the scene of his labours a land where to be a missionary was a most capital offence; there along the shore on stakes stood the heads of others who had perished vainly while striving to utter the word of truth to ears that willed not to hearken.

So, as soon as the Saint set foot on shore, and, opening his mouth, began speaking, the natives ran in upon him with one consent, and severed

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his head from his body in order that they might set it with the rest on the pole which already stood waiting it.

But straightway how great became their amazement and horror to see the body leap upon its feet, and run clapping its hands into the shelter of the adjacent forest.

“Of a truth,” they said, “this then was a devil who came over with a missionary’s head upon his shoulders! And we with one brave stroke have caused the devil to run, dropping his mouthpiece.”

Then taking up the Saint’s head, they stuck it upon its pole, and began pelting it with mud and stones; when, on a sudden, the head opened its mouth, and broke miraculously into speech.

“As I was saying, my brethren,” continued the Saint, “before you came and interrupted me—I am a sower of the word. Just at present it seems that I have fallen upon stony ground; yet may these stones become children to Abraham.”

The natives of that land waited to hear no more; howling in terror they fled away, and left the Saint’s head still talking to itself on the top of the pole.

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All day long the holy head endeavoured to lure them to its call with words of reassurance and subtlety, and at night whiled away the hours with sweet snatches of psalmody and prayer.

Presently, under the shelter of darkness, back to the Saint crept his body out of the forest, and sat down facing him.

"Why, thou vile slave and escaped lunatic," cried he, "where hast thou been all this while?" His tongueless body, gesticulating with its hands, made answer, "Thy servant went no whither!—or, having no head upon his shoulders to bear false witness against him, cannot answer—which is all the same thing."

"Come," said the Saint, "and prop thy shoulders under me, and thy head is restored to thee!"

"I will not," said the body, making eloquent signs, "until we have come to a fair bargain."

"What is thy bargain?" asked the Saint.

His body took up the dumb alphabet on its fingers, and spoke at length:

"First," it said, "thou shalt no longer beat and ill-use me, except it be with my consent. Secondly, thou shalt eat meat on Fridays as on

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other days. Thirdly, thou shalt give me a couch with pillows to sleep on, instead of a plank-bed garnished about with thorns. Fourthly, a shirt of linen and a leathern girdle instead of a hair-shirt and a knotted cord; and fifthly, when I demand a bath, thou shalt not deny it me, or palm off mud upon me, and therein forcibly cause me to lie down and wallow. Promise me these five things, and my shoulders shall again take up the addled yoke of thy brains as aforetime."

"For this," said the Saint, "let me once more get a head on thee, and I will give thee such a beating as shall surprise thee!"

"Then," said the body, "if that be thine answer, I go, and there is no getting me!" And saying this, he departed once more into cover of the forest.

Now presently the natives, standing afar off, and peeping fearfully, saw a wonder; for day by day came ravens, and perched upon the Saint's head, feeding him with pieces of bread, and anointing him with cruses of oil. And all day long his tongue cried to the inhabitants to draw near and gather in the words of his wisdom.

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So at last they said among themselves, "This is no devil, but a god!" And they drew near and imbibed his teaching, and in no long time became converts to Christianity.

Then said the Saint, "But unless you restore my body to me I cannot make Christians of you; for baptism is needed."

They said, "Where is thy body?"

He answered, "As a beast it runs wild in the forest, and makes its lair in the rocks and caves. Catch it, and bring it to me, and all shall be well. Also let a stout stick be laid handy; for I shall need it when once more I have my body under me."

So they laid the stick handy; and went away into the forest, and began hunting the body that they might catch it and bring it back to the Saint for chastisement, and for sacramental use afterwards.

For three days up and down they hunted it, and for three days the body dodged and ran, climbing trees, and swimming torrents, and leaping over precipices. At last, when they had driven it to the top of a tree whence was no escape, but that no other could climb, an archer drew his bow and shot an arrow which smote it

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under the fifth rib, so that giving up the ghost it dropped to the ground, as undeniable a corpse as ever fell vanquished before odds; for though it had lost its head and could do well without it, its heart was in the right place.

They brought it and laid it before the Saint. "Ah me!" said the Saint, somewhat perturbed on beholding its state, "I forgot to say that it must be brought to me alive!"

"But," said the natives, "it fought as a mother for her young; so it fought—not to be taken! Therefore we had to slay it."

"Well," said the Saint, "since it is here, we must make the best of it. Now take my head, and set it where it should be upon the shoulders; peradventure, then, when the body feels its master, it will revive and return to life."

So they took the Saint's head with all reverence, and set it there where it should be upon the shoulders, even as he had bidden them. But as soon as his head came to touch with the dead body, at once with a great sigh all breath went out of him, and he lay defunct in the midst of his unbaptised proselytes.

And Those to Whom, no long time after, he came to render an account of these things, said,

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“Hadst thou but been pitiful—not smiting thy body, but treating it with a little fairness and reverence—then thou mightest have become a great Saint, and Founder of the Faith to all that region; but now, for that thy converts were left unbaptised, they cannot receive the gifts of the Spirit, but are lapsed again into the outer darkness of heathendom and unbelief, and thy work among them has been in vain, and thy life unprofitable.”

Nevertheless, had he but known the Saint might have had some melancholy satisfaction. For his converts, remembering what wonders it had done, cut his head again from his body, and made a god of it. And in that faith it wrought many miracles and borne before them into battle won their wars for them against other tribes—including many that were Christian.

VIII: Philosophical Romances

(1)

THE MERCHANT AND THE ROBBER

A MERCHANT, having charge of a very valuable jewel, was travelling for safety in the garb of a beggar, when he was set upon by three robbers who demanded of him the stone.

Perceiving that his assailants were aware of his secret, he said to them, "Why should three of you wish to be hanged for a robbery that a single one of you (seeing that I am unarmed) could as easily accomplish; or why should three of you combine to take that which can only make one of you happy?"

They answered him, "We are not going to be hanged: we shall sell the jewel and divide the proceeds equally between us."

"You seem to be very honest fellows," said the merchant, "but you are none the less fools! This jewel belongs to my master, the Emperor;

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and assuredly I shall inform him of how you have robbed me."

"You will not!" they replied, "for before we part you will be dead."

"Whether I am to die or not will be presently revealed," answered the merchant, "for that is in the hands of Allah: but it grieves me that all three of you should seek to stain your souls with the crime of killing me. Therefore I will give up this jewel to that one of you alone who will refrain from adding my murder to the list of his iniquities."

As he said this, the merchant perceived the gentlest of the robbers twitching an open palm towards him. Throwing to him the jewel, he said: "Take it and run, and may Allah reward you for your mercy!"

The robber having the jewel in possession fled, pursued by the other two, who presently came up with him. The conflict which ensued was watched by the merchant with interest. Many hard blows were exchanged ere the gentle robber came off exhausted but victorious, leaving the other two dead upon the ground.

Then the merchant advanced towards him with a bold front and demanded the restoration

The Merchant and the Robber

of the jewel. The gentle robber, seeing himself now weakened by wounds, and the merchant strong, made no difficulty about returning the stolen property.

“Your shameless greed has saved my life,” said the merchant, “but it is not well in the eyes of Allah that you should go unpunished.” Having said so, he bound his preserver to a tree and bastinadoed him unsparingly. “One feels no gratitude,” he added, “to those who benefit us by the exercise of ill-gotten power.”

“I should think,” wept the gentle robber as the merchant was departing, “that you must be an Emperor yourself to play such a high and mighty mean trick on one whom you yourself led into temptation!”

THE KING'S PLEASURE

A POOR woman in a certain Eastern town had four daughters. And of these, one was so fair that all men turned to look at her if she but lifted the curtain of an eyelash, and one was so plain and ordinary that no man gave her a second glance; the third was so ugly that a man seeing her turned from her his face; and the fourth was so frightful that, beholding her, men shuddered and trembled.

Now, it was the custom in that country that, whenever the King went forth on a progress through his dominions, in whatsoever city he came to stay, the fairest maiden of that place was chosen to bear him company and delight him with her beauty and her conversation, and receive the royal bounty, which on the morrow after served her for a dowry. And for that cause and for the honour that had been done her, many came and sought for her hand in

The King's Pleasure

marriage. Therefore in every town the strife to be chosen as the fairest of the maidens was great.

Now, it so happened that one day news came to that place where dwelt the mother and her four daughters that the King was presently to pass through the town, and to rest for the night within its walls. So with all haste the chief men gathered together the fairest maidens that were to be found, to make choice of the one who should delight the King with her beauty and her conversation and thereafter receive the royal bounty. And first five maidens were chosen; and of these the fairest of the woman's four daughters was one. Then only one was chosen; and she was not that one. So she returned home weeping bitterly.

Her mother said to her: "It is not for nothing that I have four daughters of all degrees from beauty to extreme ugliness; therefore, my fair one, let thine eyes be dry, and let thy loveliness shine, for thou, and none other, shalt go in and delight the King with thy beauty and thy conversation, and receive thereafter the royal bounty."

Now, thus it happened that when the King

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was yet a good way from the city, he came, under a group of palm-trees, upon a fair maiden, making a noise of lamentation and weeping most bitterly. Struck by her loveliness, and by her sweet voice, he stayed and said: "Maiden, why are you weeping? If any man hath done you an injury, be sure that he shall be punished for it."

"Alas," answered the maiden, "to-day the King is coming to the city, and there are five maidens chosen, out of whom the most beautiful was again chosen, to delight the King with her beauty and her conversation, and afterwards to receive the royal bounty. I was one of the five, but four were preferred before me; therefore I am weeping!"

The King, hearing this, marvelled that within that city there should be four maidens more beautiful than this one, whom, therefore, he left weeping, and rode on with great haste and joy towards the town.

And when he was come a little nearer, over a well by the wayside, he saw a maiden leaning and weeping. So plain of aspect was she that he would have given her no second glance; but

The King's Pleasure

because her grief seemed great he paused and said: "Woman, why are you weeping?"

"Alas," she answered, "to-day the King is coming to the city, and there were five maidens chosen, out of whom the most beautiful was again to be chosen, to delight the King with her beauty and her conversation, and afterwards to receive the royal bounty. I was one of the five, but three were preferred before me; therefore I am weeping!"

The King was greatly astonished and disturbed to find that one so plain had been among the chosen, of whom one was to delight him with her beauty and her conversation. "Are these townsmen mad," said he "that they have preferred this one to the one that I left weeping under the palm-trees? On their heads be it if I find anything worse awaiting me!"

Yet a little farther he came upon a woman sitting in the dust beating her breast, and making lamentations, and so ugly was she that at first he turned away his eyes; but because her lamentation was great and that the thing seemed incredible, he drew rein and said: "O wretched one, why are you weeping?"

"Alas," she answered, "to-day the King is

coming to the city, and there were five maidens chosen, out of whom the most beautiful was again to be chosen, to delight the King with her beauty and her conversation, and afterwards to receive the royal bounty. I was one of the five, but two were preferred before me; therefore I am weeping!”

Deeply astonished, the King said to himself: “I will yet see the end of this!” and so rode on. And in a little while he came upon one who crouched by a heap of rubbish, and buried her face therein and wailed.

And, when at the sound of his coming she lifted herself to look at him, her face was so frightful that he shuddered merely to behold it. But because she was so hideous he stopped short and said: “O incredibly foul wretch, why are *you* weeping?”

“Alas,” she answered, “to-day the King is coming to the city, and there were five maidens chosen, out of whom the most beautiful was again to be chosen, to delight the King with her beauty and her conversation, and afterwards to receive the royal bounty. I was one of the five, but one was preferred before me; therefore I am weeping!”

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To himself the King said: "On their heads it shall be!" and he called to two of his escort: "Go back quickly and bring away with you the fair maiden whom we left weeping under the palm-trees, so that, when those that now mock at me mock no more, I may have delight in her beauty and her conversation, and bestow on her the royal bounty."

So they rode back swiftly and brought her; and, setting her by his side, the King rode into the city.

Straightway before him came the chiefs and magistrates of the people bearing gifts of salt and bread and earth; and with them also they brought the chosen of all maidens wearing a veil over her beauty.

The King grew possessed with rage and madness at the sight. "Away with her!" he cried. "She is so foul, if I look at her she will blast me with the hideousness of her features. Never let her look at me!"

The maiden who had been chosen, hearing this, and seeing her rival riding at the King's side, conscious also of her own beauty, threw back her veil.

At sight of that fairness the King shut his

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eyes. "Let her die!" he cried. "For she is the most terrible of all, in that she makes her ugliness to appear beautiful, and would so bring my senses to perdition!"

So there and then he caused her head to be cut off, and also the heads of all the chief magistrates. And on the morrow the fairest daughter divided the royal bounty with all her sisters, according to their degrees of ugliness, keeping the least for herself who had least need thereof. Thus were they all after no long time sought for in marriage; and the name of their mother was made honourable.

THE KING'S JESTER

“**K**ING,” said the jester to his master one day, “raise my wages, for this work is too hard for me.”

“How—hard?” inquired the king. “To rattle bells and crack jokes—is that such hard work after all?”

“I swear,” answered the jester, “’tis the hardest day’s work done in all this kingdom. Ah, if you could see the solemn faces that I see! Instead, you only see my merry one.”

“I would willingly,” said the King, “exchange tasks with thee for a day, were that possible. But I cannot endow thee with that high rank whereto I was born.”

“Nor I thee with my sense of humour,” said the fool.

“Nevertheless,” said the King, “in all externals we can make the exchange. Give me thy cap and bells, and I will give thee my crown and throne; and albeit no honour can go with

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it, I will forbid any to laugh at thee except behind thy back."

"Well, for one day," said the jester; "and for my part I will laugh at thee if I can."

So for one day the jester took robe and crown and sitting in the King's place received outward honour from all; and for one day the King, with a shilling for wages, wore the motley and went about cudgelling his wits for the jokes that never came.

Before the end of the day, he came to the jester and said, "Loon, for God's sake, relieve me from my bargain now, and I will raise thy wages a penny a day, for truly this task of thine is harder than I knew. Own too, having now tried it, that the splendour of kingly state barely covers the pains."

"King," cried the jester, "that must I shortly have owned with my dying breath; for truly without a good jester to make pastime, I discover that a throne is intolerable!"

(4)

THE KING AND THE PHILOSOPHER

A CERTAIN King happening to be bound on a private adventure which required not only secrecy and discretion, but two persons to handle it with ease and comfort, took with him a learned slave, in whose fidelity and sagacity he had the utmost confidence. The King having instructed his companion as to the affair in hand, the philosophic one perceived that his presence and assistance were absolutely necessary for the King's comfort and safety.

Therefore, as they were crossing by a narrow footbridge a torrent, considerably swollen by rains, the slave folded his arms, committed himself to the favour of God, and projected himself into the flood below.

The King perceiving his slave about to be snatched from him at a time highly inconvenient for his own person, and learning by hasty inquiry that the Philosopher had only a

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book-knowledge of swimming, plunged selfishly to the rescue.

To his surprise he found that all the rudiments of swimming which the Philosopher possessed were being employed by him to escape the life-saving clutches which his master was directing towards him. As often as the monarch caught hold of a garment, the Philosopher quitted it with the agility of an acrobat. "Your majesty," said he, "may succeed in undressing me, but you shall not succeed in saving me!"

"How is this?" asked the King. "Have you no gratitude for the efforts I am making on your behalf?"

"I am your majesty's property," said the Philosopher, "and the efforts you make interest me, but do not excite my gratitude. Yet I am flattered to see the value you put upon the head of one so unworthy."

"What," cried the King, "is the object you have behind your present evasion of my wishes?"

"I am determined," answered the other, "that death is preferable to slavery, even to the kindest of masters; and I will only give my-

The King and the Philosopher

self up into your majesty's hands on condition that you restore to me my liberty."

The King, having no other course open, consented to the Philosopher's terms, and ratified the same with an oath. The Philosopher then committed himself to the King's arms, and they presently came to land in safety at a point some five miles farther down the stream than that at which the controversy between them had begun.

Without any further dispute they continued their adventure together, in the course of which the Philosopher proved himself many times essential to the King's comfort and safety.

On their return to the capital the King caused a document to be drawn up restoring to the Philosopher his liberty. But the next day the monarch, who had caught a violent cold from his long immersion in the water, gave orders for the head of his new freeman to be cut off. By which it may be seen that with kings an oath is an instrument which may easily lose its point, whereas freedom is a weapon which kings also can handle, cutting both ways.

THE POET AND HIS MISTRESS

IN Hell, amongst all the brave company that is ever to be found there of lovers and fair ladies and astrologers, tossing and turning to get rid of the torment of their hot bodies, one woman sat alone and smiled. She had the air of a listener, lifting her head now and then as though some voice from above attracted her.

“Who is that woman?” inquired a new-comer, dazzled by her exceeding beauty, “the one with smooth ivory limbs and long hair falling down over her arms to the hands resting and on to her lap? She is the only soul here whose eyes are ever looking aloft. What skeleton does she keep in the cupboard of God up yonder?”

“They say,” one made haste to answer, “that she was a great singer in her day, with a voice like a falling star in a clear sky; and that when she came here to meet her doom, God took her voice from her and cast it to the eternal echoes

The Poet and His Mistress

of the spheres, finding it too beautiful a thing to let die. So now she hears it with recognition, and remembering how once it was her own, shares still the pleasure that God takes in it. Do not speak to her, for she believes that she is in Heaven."

"No, that is not her story," said another.

"What, then?"

"It is this: On earth a poet made his songs of her, so that her name became eternally wedded to his verse, which still rings on the lips of men. Now she lifts her head and hears his praise of her eternally going on wherever language is spoken. That is her true story."

"Did she love him well?"

"So little that here and now she passes him daily and does not recognise his face!"

"And he?"

"The other laughed and answered: "It is he who just now told you that tale concerning her voice, continuing here the lies which he used to make about her when they two were on earth!"

But the new-comer said, "If he is able to give happiness in Hell, how can what he says be a lie?"

THE KING AND HIS WORD

A CERTAIN King became greatly enamoured of a lady whose beauty was such that it dazzled all beholders. Therefore he desired to make her his wife.

She, however, would have none of him. "I know too well," said she, "what fate awaits all beautiful women who marry kings; for a while they are loved with trust, then they are loved with jealousy; then, for no cause at all, their beautiful heads are taken off them and piled on a dish before the King to be regarded merely as the fruits of experience."

The King was ready to protest all faith in her, but she stopped his lips. "Nay," said she, "unless you swear to me by Heaven and by Hell, by your honour among men, and your soul's safety hereafter, also by the tombs of your ancestors, that you will do me no hurt except you yourself discover me in an act of unfaithfulness towards you, I will not accept the peril of this honour which you thrust on me."

The King and His Word

So the King swore by Heaven and by Hell, by his honour and by his soul, and by the tombs of his ancestors, giving her the oath in writing sealed with the royal signet. And she, for her part, gave him her promise that she would be faithful to him while life lasted.

So they were married, and in no long time the King began to be devoured by the pangs of jealousy, eating daily the bread of doubt, and drinking the waters of suspicion. Never dared he let himself go from her side, save it were when he went yearly to worship and fast at the tombs of his ancestors, to which no woman, not the Queen herself, might go.

In vain did he surround her with guards, and set spies of his most trusted servants to bring him word of her doings, no slur or stain could any of them cast on the Queen's honour; and all the more did the absence of rumour inflame his jealousy. He believed that her beauty had beguiled all men into her service against him; nay, at last he suspected that every man who failed to bring word crediting her with dishonour must be himself a partner in the offence; so there were many executions done in

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those days in solemn sacrifice to the Queen's beauty.

Forty-nine times he bore to the verge of madness the weight of jealousy that came at each time of ceremonial absence; for the passing of years made no diminution in the Queen's loveliness.

On the fiftieth anniversary, when the days of sacred fasting and seclusion called for him, beseeching forgiveness of Heaven, he turned back secretly from the tombs of his ancestors, nor stayed the set time; for now his will mounted to madness that he would have proof for his jealousy and release from his royal oath which made him refrain from the word for her death. Therefore, with great subtlety, the King put on the disguise of a merchant, staining his face and hands, and letting no mark on his person show by which he might be known. Then he took with him jewels of great price, and coming to the palace caused himself to be led into the presence of the Queen.

She, seeing such wonders, was willing to give all the wealth she had to get possession of them. But the King had left her with a small purse, and the price he now asked was fabulous.

The King and His Word

When she informed him that this was beyond her, he answered softly, "There is another price, O fairest of all fair women, that can only be asked in secret."

Then she put all forth from her and said, "Thou would'st come into my chamber to ask me that?" "Even so," said he. And she answered, "Give me the jewels: whatever it is I grant it before the asking." Then she retired from him for a while, but afterwards returned, and she led him in; and they were together, and all doors closed.

About midnight she said to him, "My lord, forty-nine times thou hast returned to me in disguise; yet is it only at this fiftieth time that I have discovered thee!"

Then the King rose, and drawing forth his sword, cried, "Now out of thine own mouth hast thou released me, and given me back my royal word, to do to thee as thou deservest." And so saying he struck off her head.

On the morrow when the King sat in state, and the Queen's death was noised in whispers through the palace, there came to him a slave that had been in the Queen's service, bearing a small coffer and weeping. "Oh, my lord," said

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the slave, "yesterday while you were yet absent, the Queen gave me this, and bade me lay it before the King's feet on his return, telling him how great was her sorrow that she had not herself power now, to be its bearer."

Wondering, the King took the casket. In it lay his own written word sealed and signed, and beside it another scroll, which, opening, he read: "O Lord, to kill and to make alive, when thou receivest this thou art without honour on earth and without soul in Heaven, for I shall be dead by thy hand, not having been found by thee in any act of unfaithfulness soever. For neither in body nor in spirit was there deceit in me, seeing that I beheld thee through thy disguise. As for that which I told thee, truly thou hast returned to me forty-nine times disguised as a King; only this fiftieth time have I known thee certainly for the dust thou art. And since my beauty, through thy jealousy, brought death to many, it is better that I only should die, who have become over-weary of my bondage to such a one as thee. So now I beg thee, who art without honour or soul, for the little time that is left thee, have pity upon others whose life thou would'st cut in half."

The King and His Word

The King read: and straightway he ordered to be struck off the head of the slave who had brought him the Queen's message; for though by his oath he had neither honour nor soul left, he remembered that he was still a King.

THE ROSE AND THE THORN

A CERTAIN Commander of the Faithful had, as the Favourite of his harem, a lady more beautiful than all the stars and their moons about them—but with a shrew's tongue. The pathway to her favour lay through torrents of abuse, which cast him without dignity and crownless before her imperious feet. But, none the less, love of her mastered him so greatly that he looked on no other woman with any concern.

After many sleepless nights and days without rest, he hardly knew whether he were the most cursed or the most blessed of mortals; for truly his vigils gave him the continual consciousness of her charms, though all the while her mouth was like a crater of a volcano in eruption pouring out lava of vituperation upon his head.

One day his chief chamberlain, beholding him nursing a sick headache, said, "Why, O shadow of God, dost thou continue to endure this evil, seeing that He hath made thee the

The Rose and the Thorn

master of all things? If the Light of the harem were tongueless she were perfect. Therefore give orders, O Commander of the Faithful, and it shall be seen to!"

So presently the counsel of the chief chamberlain took effect, and the Favourite's mouth became as a dove's for quietness. But now the Sultan found that his love for her was altogether flown; her beauty seemed to him flavourless and insipid; and all desire for her favours grew drowsy for lack of the naggings wherewith she had been wont so constantly to assail him.

Then he saw that her way with him had been one of pure reason and beneficence. Seeing that kings, having through their high estate to be left uncorrected in other matters, have need to be corrected to their appetites, by goadings and thwartings which are not necessary for the less spoiled children of fortune.

And because of his deep grief, the Sultan sacked the chief chamberlain, and sought through all his dominions till he found another woman less fair, but gifted in like measure with a shrewishness of tongue to take the place of his lost Favourite.

THE MAN WHO SOLD HIS SOUL

A CERTAIN traveller, passing through the streets of a great city, came there upon a man whose countenance indicated a grief which he could not fathom. The traveller, being a curious student of the human heart, stopped him and said: "Sir, what is this grief which you carry before the eyes of all men, so grievous that it cannot be hidden, yet so deep that it cannot be read?"

The man answered: "It is not I who grieve so greatly; it is my soul, of which I cannot rid me. And my soul is more sorrowful than death, for it hates me, and I hate it."

The traveller said: "If you will sell your soul to me, you can be well rid of it."

The other answered: "Sir, how can I sell you my soul?"

"Surely," replied the traveller, "you have but to agree to sell me your soul at its full price; then, when I bid it, it comes to me. But every

The Man Who Sold His Soul

soul has its true price; and only at that, neither at more nor at less, can it be bought."

Then said the other: "At what price shall I sell you this horrible thing, my soul?"

The traveller answered: "When a man first sells his own soul he is like that other betrayer; therefore its price should be thirty pieces of silver. But after that, if it passes to other hands, its value becomes small; for to others the souls of their fellow-men are worth very little."

So for thirty pieces of silver the man sold his soul; and the traveller took it and departed.

Presently the man, having no soul, found that he could do no sin. Though he stretched out his arms to sin, sin would not come to him. "You have no soul," said sin, and passed him by. "Wherefore should I come to you? I have no profit in a man that has no soul."

Then the man without a soul became very miserable, for though his hands touched what was foul they remained clean, and though his heart longed for wickedness, it remained pure; and when he thirsted to dip his lips in fire, they remained cool.

Therefore a longing to recover his soul took hold of him, and he went through the world

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searching for the traveller to whom he had sold it, that he might buy it back, and again taste sin in his own body.

After a long time the traveller met him; but hearing his request he laughed and said: "After a while your soul wearied me, and I sold it to a Jew for a smaller sum than I paid for it."

"Ah!" cried the man, "if you had come to me I would have paid more."

The traveller answered: "You could not have done that; a soul cannot be bought or sold but at its just price. Your soul came to be of small value in my keeping; so to be rid of it I sold it to the first comer for considerably less money than I paid in the beginning."

So parting from him the man continued his quest, wandering over the face of the earth and seeking to recover his lost soul. And one day, as he sat in the bazaar of a certain town, a woman passed him, and looking at him said: "Sir, why are you so sad? It seems to me there can be no reason for such sadness."

The man answered: "I am sad because I have no soul, and am seeking to find it."

The other said: "Only the other night I bought a soul that had passed through so many

The Man Who Sold His Soul

hands that it had become dirt-cheap; but it is so poor a thing I would gladly be rid of it. Yet I bought it for a mere song; and a soul can only be sold at its just price; how, then, shall I be able to sell it again—for what is worth less than a song? And it was but a light song that I sang over the wine-cup to the man who sold it me.”

When the other heard that, he cried: “It is my own soul! Sell it to me, and I will give you all that I possess!”

The woman said: “Alas, I did but pay for it with a song, and I can but sell it again at its just price. How then can I be rid of it, though it cries and laments to be set free?”

The man without a soul laid his head to the woman’s breast, and heard within it the captive soul whimpering to be set free, to return to the body it had lost. “Surely,” he said, “it is my own soul! If you will sell it to me I will give you my body, which is worth less than a song from your lips.”

So, for his body, the other sold to him the soul that whimpered to be set free to return to its own place. But so soon as he received it he rose up aghast: “What have you done?” he

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cried, "and what is this foul thing that has possession of me? For this soul that you have given me is not *my* soul!"

The woman laughed and said: "Before you sold your soul into captivity it was a free soul in a free body; can you not recognise it now it comes to you from the traffic of the slave-market? So, then, your soul has the greater charity, since it recognises and returns to you, though you have sold your body miserably into bondage!"

And thus it was that the man had to buy back, at the cost of his body, the soul which he let go for thirty pieces of silver.

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FATHER AND SON

THERE was once a young man of left-handed parentage, who, from his birth, had been seized with an unnatural desire to redress in the punishment of his father the wrong done to his mother. She indeed had been the victim of a betrayal cruel enough to arouse more than ordinary resentment. But she was of a mild and forgiving disposition, and the only act of self-assertion she allowed herself, was to die in giving her son birth.

With just so much assistance from her as that, the son started on life equipped with all the passionate and unforgiving qualities of his other parent.

From the days when he could first toddle, his aim was to wreak vengeance on the man whose cruelty and neglect had made him at once a bastard and an orphan.

So soon as he was grown up to independence,

his years of indiscretion began, and he started nosing among the garbage of humanity for a clue to his father's whereabouts.

Presently getting wind of him, the son almost had him in hand had not his parent, pricked by a guilty conscience, fled hurriedly to a place of concealment and safety.

Again pursued, he took flight into the next hemisphere. The world watching beheld a breathless hide-and-seek going on between the pair, so that after a few years the weary life his son caused him to lead, forced the father into a certain measure of repentance which would not otherwise have occurred to him. Thus it came about that finally he died in something like the odour of sanctity, respectably attended by priest and doctor.

His son arrived only in time to curse the doctor for having precipitated a catastrophe which a lifetime of wrathful sun-settings had taught him to regard as his own perquisite. He returned home sadly and hanged himself to his mother's gravestone, trusting to be permitted in the next world to carry out the interrupted project of vengeance which was now his one passion.

Father and Son

In Hell he was greatly delighted to find that the law still permitted and encouraged the pursuit of vengeance; and for a good while he found some enjoyment running about in search of the man he wished to devour.

After weeks of a species of fiery slumming in the lowest quarter of the infernal regions, he received from the Devil a kindly word of enlightenment. "My poor child," said he, "do you not know that, thanks to you, your father made a penitent ending, and in consequence is receiving his reward in a better place than this?"

For the first time the revengeful soul thirsted with despair, perceiving the gulf fixed. "Now I know that I am in Hell," said he with conviction, "since I cannot give that man of sin the drubbing he deserves."

Casting about in his mind—"And my mother?" he added presently.

"Poor, forgiving little thing!" said the Devil compassionately, "I have not the heart to grudge her her present happiness. While you were on earth threatening perdition to the man she loved she had a devil of a time of it, but your arrival here transported her to the seventh heaven."

THE PRINCE AND HIS TWO MISTRESSES

A CERTAIN Prince had a mistress, of whom, after many years, he began to tire, finding her exceeding faithfulness to him grow wearisome. So beginning to neglect his former passion, and having lighted on a new love of deeper complexion and more to his present taste, he made a song in praise of her beauty.

“After day,” he sang, “comes night, and the moon lifts up her face; after red locks dark locks have hold of me!”

Before long his former mistress, observing that his ardour slackened, found where her felicity had flown to; and without haste took counsel with herself how to regain the lost place which her jealousy and devotion still coveted.

Presently on his visits to his new mistress, the Prince began to recognise certain jewels adorning her person, which he had bestowed in

The Prince and His Two Mistresses

other days on the one who had then crowned his fancy. "Whence came these?" he began inquiring, after searching vainly in his own mind for a solution.

For a while his new lady-love sought to evade his questions; but when she could no more put him off (while she needs must flaunt the trinkets as more and more of them came into her possession), she answered: "There is a certain skew-eyed and faded creature, a poor broken-down old troll, who comes and drops these on me at times. And her tale is of the strangest; but as I profit by her madness I let it go. And what she says to me is this: 'One of the many who have long wearied me with their love is now your lover; and that is well, since it leaves me free to follow my own liking. Therefore, I pray you bind him close to you and keep him from troubling me further; and every time that you receive him I, in thankfulness to be rid of him, will bring you a token of my gratitude, which I hold well earned, since then I can be in the arms of the lover I love truly.' This is her story and truly I have reaped profit out of it, for each time you visit me she brings me a fresh jewel. Why, then, should I laugh

in the face of the poor thing who is happy in her folly?"

But when he had considered the matter well, the Prince left her, and went back to his former mistress.

TWO KINGS AND THEIR QUEENS

TWO Kings, who bore rule over adjoining territories, having come together amicably, in state and with a great retinue, for the settlement of a disputed question of boundaries, became greatly enamoured each of the other's consort.

While in public they were defining one boundary amicably from day to day, each in secret was plotting how another boundary might be overstepped. The Queens, finding themselves royally pursued, remained demure, but put their heads together for a friendly purpose by stealth, not wishing to disturb the political situation.

So presently, by the aid of chamberlains and ladies of honour, all ready to take bribes at cross-purposes, the game grew hot; virtuous protestation died on the Queens' lips, and the monarchs came each to the belief that he had,

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without knowledge of the other, secured an assignation which would overwhelm him in felicity.

A hunting expedition, and a certain misarrangement of the pavilions destined for the separated repose of royalty, gave the occasion and the means; the Kings beheld a way pointed to them, more plainly than by any star in the East, for the consummation of their desires.

What was the chagrin of the two monarchs on awakening to the light of reason after an experience which had made each believe himself the most blest of mortals, to find that they had fallen into a lawful embrace, and had deceived themselves with the decorous bonds of matrimony.

The ladies themselves put a quiet countenance on the matter, and were astonished when presently they lost their two heads for the crime of being found in the embraces of their own true lords, time not being given them to make the mathematical calculation by which their judges arrived at a conviction of their intended guiltiness.

Whether, indeed, those lords signed their death-warrants as thieves defrauded of their

Two Kings and Their Queens

booty, or as owners finding their possession threatened, only kings themselves can decide. But it is sometimes more dangerous to force kings into the paths of virtue than to attract them into the ways of vice.

A HEART OF STONE

THERE was once a sculptor who had made a statue which seemed to him the most beautiful thing in the world. It was the figure of a woman, in the state which is called natural; and before long the artist had become so enamoured of his handiwork that he prayed night and day that the Gods would breathe into it the breath of life, and so make him the happiest of mortals.

All round the statue he set mirrors, so that he might behold it from all sides at once; he crowned it with flowers and hung jewels upon its arms; yet in no way could the pride of his eyes bring him the satisfaction for which he was perishing. Having created his ideal he found himself destined only to behold it removed from him by an insuperable barrier, lacking the life which alone could satisfy his senses.

The Gods, harassed by his importunacy, but

A Heart of Stone

remembering how on a like occasion the gratification of inordinate artistic passions had resulted not wholly to the happiness of those most concerned, discovered sufficient conscience in themselves not to satisfy all at once the craving of this artist's soul without inquiring first what the wishes of the other party might be. "Before we grant this prayer," said the Father of the Gods, "we will ask the statue what is her own will in the matter. If she consents, the experiment shall once more be made."

"Let us proceed cautiously," said one, "for the Gods themselves cannot control folly, when once it is fullblown."

So the sculptor, having been thrown into a trance, where he lay before the feet of his beloved, the Gods and Goddesses entered by the toplight of the studio and proceeded to examine the statue which had raised so great a passion in the artist's soul.

Between them they thought very little indeed of the production. "Have patience," said the Father of the Gods, "we must force back our bright intelligences, and see as men see! Wait till the glow of life enters into these limbs!"

"Be cautious," cried Ganymede, "for I would not have *them* spring on me all at once!"

The Father of the Gods touched with his finger the blind eyes of the statue; and immediately they came to light, and peeped out like lizards from a stone wall.

"Have a care, have a care!" cried Ganymede: "if I mistake not she has vicious instincts, and a temper to fit Juno's!—Queen of Heaven, we are out of court here; free speech is not allowed to us."

The Father of the Gods touched the ears and lips of the statue; then he spoke: "Be it known unto you, O Statue, we are the Gods. Most things are made by us: all things that have life."

"We did not make *you*!" said Ganymede.

"You were made," the Father of the Gods went on, "by this man who here lies asleep at your feet: therefore you have not life. He, loving the work of his hands, prays that you may have life, that he may be happy and contented in the society of the thing which he has created. It only remains to ask—do you wish to have life?"

The statue looked at herself in the mirrors that were set about her; she looked at the un-

A Heart of Stone

clothed beauty of the Goddesses who stood near; she looked at the man her maker lying upon the floor at her feet, with all the implements of his craft scattered around him.

"Yes," she said, "God! I do wish to have life!"

"In that case I am going!" said Ganymede, and he departed: but the curiosity of the rest caused them to stay that they might see the matter to its conclusion.

The Father of the Gods passed his hands over the statue, and breathed over her the breath that gives warmth to mortality. From face to feet she flushed into life. The God, turning about, stooped down to arouse the sleeper, that he might wake to see the desire of his soul, and be satisfied.

Quick as thought the statue leaped down from her pedestal: "No, no, do not wake him!" she cried.

The Father of the Gods drew back: "That is like a woman," said he; "she wishes to catch her fish sleeping."

The statue had caught up a chisel and mallet which lay near; with one blow of the mallet she drove the chisel through the sculptor's brain, and pinned him to the floor. Not till she

was quite sure that he was dead did she draw out the weapon.

"You wicked baggage," said the Father of the Gods, overcome with astonishment at this performance, "why, you have killed the man who made you!"

"I meant to!" said the statue: "why did he make my nose so long, and my legs so short, and my one eye bigger than the other? You should make better artists while you are about it; you deserve to have a chisel through *your* head next!"

At this outrageous remark the Father of the Gods set her back upon her pedestal, and struck her once more into stone.

Too late he found he had perpetuated her victory: she stood in a defiant attitude, holding the mallet in one hand, and the chisel with which she had done the deed, in the other.

This caused great surprise and consternation and scandal, the next day, when the char-woman, coming to sweep out the studio as was her custom, found the sculptor lying dead, and the statue standing over him, holding the blood-stained instrument of vengeance in her hand.

THE MIRROR AND THE MISTRESS

A CERTAIN lover, failing to win the heart of his mistress, who was more to him than all the rest of life, went to seek help of a wise woman. "Tell me," said he, "my fortune in love."

She dipped her finger in his tears, and held it up to the sun and wind; and the wind dried it, while the sun went in.

"You may choose," she said then, "anything you like but this. However patient or virtuous, however brave or strong, you cannot be her lover."

"But I am that already," answered the forlorn youth, "and so shall remain eternally."

"Yet never while you keep that form which God gave you," replied the other, "shall she look on you with an eye of favour."

"Then I will change it," said he.

"As you will," answered the wise woman. "Ask what you like so long as it is not the one

impossible thing: and do not complain afterwards at the price."

The youth thought for a while; then he said, "Since I cannot win her love as a man, let me be her mirror; then at least she will look at me with an eye of favour; and I shall ever see her, and she me. Surely she will love me a little then, seeing her own face in my breast."

So, by aid of the wise woman's spells, he became the mirror of his mistress. Every time she came to gaze therein, "I love you, I love you!" cried the mirror, making no sound, and had such joy in beholding her, and in returning that fair image of her face that as the years went by she forgot that she could ever grow old. For the mirror saw no change in her while her pride in her own beauty lasted; therefore she saw none in the mirror.

The faithful mirror knew all her history from her face. One day she came looking more beautiful than ever before, and gazing into her glass she smiled. "He loves me!" she said.

"He loves you," smiled the mirror in reply, beginning without a murmur to pay back the price of its poor happiness.

Many days passed and still they looked at

The Mirror and the Mistress

each other and said the same thing. Days grew to years.

At last a time came when her beauty began to fade, but still her word was "He loves me!" and still the faithful heart of her glass made a mirage over the waste that had once been so fair.

Then, one day she came all in a wonder of despair, weeping passionately. "He loves me no longer!" she cried. "Oh, why, why?"

All her pride of belief in her beauty was gone; and looking she discovered, at last, that she had grown old.

"O false mirror, why have you deceived me?" she said; and laying it down she went away and never returned.

Before long the woman who had taken her place came and picked up the mirror from where it lay, to see in it her own fairness; but she saw there only the face of the one she had supplanted. "The mirror is bewitched!" she cried, and casting it down shattered it into a thousand fragments.

So out of pure faithfulness was the heart of the mirror broken at last.

IX: The Wise Penny and the Foolish Pound

ONE dark morning a Wise Penny and a Foolish Pound met in the pocket of a rich churchwarden.

It was Sunday: the penny was for the crossing-sweeper, the pound was for the church-plate. The churchwarden had just put on his hat and gloves, and was starting on his usual parade of benevolence. It was a dark morning, and he was a little late.

The Wise Penny clinked heads with the Foolish Pound—for all the world as if they had been equals. “And where are we going to this morning?” inquired the Wise Penny.

“I am going to church, I am,” said the Foolish Pound, very high and mighty and uplifted, “Don’t you dirty me!”

“I am not likely to do that,” said the Wise Penny good-humouredly, “for I have come just fresh from the mint. I’m so bright that unless you looked at my tail, you would hardly know the difference between us.”

The Wise Penny and the Foolish Pound

"Shouldn't I, indeed," said the Foolish Pound, a little stiffly.

"I have got Britannia sitting on *my* tail," the Wise Penny explained. "I used to have a ship and a lighthouse too; but they are out of date now."

"And there's the difference!" said the Foolish Pound in a tone of great satisfaction "I've got a St. George and the Dragon sitting on mine."

He turned himself round for the other to see. "What are they doing?" inquired the Wise Penny, examining the design with great interest.

"That is a fight between the powers of good and evil," said the Foolish Pound, "and (on my back be it!) good is getting the best of it."

"It seems to me," said the Wise Penny, "that Good is doing it in a funny way. The Dragon is trying to bite his legs and the horse is offering his own instead: and George is trying to drive the Dragon off with a sword that is too short for him. Doesn't it make you very nervous to have such a badly conducted fight as that going on behind you?"

The Wise Penny and the Foolish Pound

"No, it does not," said the Foolish Pound.
"Why should it?"

"Well, I should have thought you'd rather be rid of the Dragon—if you had the chance; and at this rate the chance doesn't seem much."

"If you were not so stupid," said the Foolish Pound, "you would see that the Dragon is only there for ornament."

"Oh, for ornament! Well, now I know. Till you told me, I thought he was there for ugliness. And where did you say you were going to—you and your ornament?"

"Church," repeated the Foolish Pound more stiffly than ever.

"And is that an ornament, too?"

"It's a place—and to-day everybody who is good goes to it. Don't you know that it's Sunday?"

"Ah, yes, the day when nobody buys things. Other days you are worth 240 of me: but to-day we are exactly the same value. Wonderful how Sunday levels all ranks; consoling, isn't it?"

"Very," said the Foolish Pound with dry irony.

"I suppose it's because we all come from the

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same Maker," went on the Wise Penny, "and He likes to bring us together occasionally, and show us that in ourselves we are not one a bit better than the other."

"On the contrary," said the Foolish Pound, "Sunday is given us to demonstrate the exact opposite. I am now on my way to the demonstration. If you could manage to escape falling into low company before we get there, you would then see my position in the world recognised."

"Now, that's very interesting," said the Wise Penny. "Do please tell me how your position in the world gets recognised on a Sunday, of all days."

"Well, I will, then," replied the other (feeling that his importance was about to be acknowledged). "We go to church, and when we get there everybody prays: they pray for a lot of things; but they pray for me more than for most things. That I am the really and only important thing worth praying for is proved when at last the preacher gets up in the pulpit and asks for me, and says he can do nothing without me. Then comes the greatest and grandest moment of all. Twelve of the best

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dressed people in church get up and take with them twelve round plates, sounding-boards, or platforms, lined with red velvet, and they go all about through the congregation looking for me. This is simply to show my importance and how anxious they are to have me; for as a matter of fact I am always most punctually on the spot, among the very first. My present owner (in whose pocket we are now travelling) carries one of these platforms himself; and before he passes it for inspection to the rest of the congregation, he plants me down in the very centre, where I can best be looked at, and all round me come half-crowns and florins and shillings and sixpences and innumerable genteel little threepenny-bits, admiring me like anything, but not one of them able to touch me: oh, no!"

"No pennies?" inquired the Wise one humbly.

"Pew-holders don't put in pennies!" replied the Foolish Pound loftily, "it wouldn't look well. They would get talked about and stared at. It would be an insult to me if they did such a thing. I never associate with pennies"—the Foolish Pound checked himself hurriedly—"That is to say—not in church, I don't; or only

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when there's a Harvest Thanksgiving—then pennies are the rule, because, you see, harvests are not much worth thinking about: you get your harvest whether you are thankful or not. I don't quite know what brings us together to-day: generally I have a pocket all to myself."

"Oh, I can explain that," said the Wise Penny. "You see, it was a dark morning, and our 'owner,' as you call him, was a little bit late and was putting his gloves on: and as I was so much the same size, and was brighter than usual to look at, he thought I was you, and put me into the wrong pocket."

"But we are *not* the same size!" said the Foolish Pound very emphatically.

"Oh, yes, we are—nearly," replied the other. "That comes of another mistake; he wanted a penny for the crossing-sweeper, but he found he had only a farthing. 'And that,' I heard him say, 'will do just as well—we'll call it a penny.' And as he calls me a penny, and as I belong to him, of course I've called myself a penny ever since. Perhaps the crossing-sweeper will call me other names, but I expect I shall be equal to them, you can't be called anything much worse than a farthing, can you?"

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“But as at present I’m called a penny I’ve a right to remain so: especially as it makes us better company—more equal in value as we are in size—which is what I said first, and what you contradicted.”

The Foolish Pound was as indignant as he was disgusted to find that he had actually been talking all this time to a mere farthing. He drew as far away from his companion as he could, and simply refused to answer him. And just then the churchwarden, who was approaching the crossing where sat the sweeper, began feeling in his pocket for the coin which he called a penny.

Now, the Wise Penny had not been quite accurate in telling how they both came to be in the same pocket: for what the churchwarden had really done, being rather flustered and late, was this: he had put the Foolish Pound by mistake into his copper-pocket first, and the thing that he called “a penny,” afterwards. The consequence of this was that when he thought to have in his hand the coin for the crossing-sweeper his intervention was as one-sided as the Day of Judgment, when, two being found in one bed, one is to be taken and the other left.

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The churchwarden took out the Foolish Pound, and left behind him, not a Wise Penny, but an enraptured crossing-sweeper.

In church that day an eloquent sermon was preached on the importance of providing Christian sunshades for naked little black boys. The little black boys did not want them and had a way of tearing them up as soon as they arrived, which not only made the demand more urgent, but the supply more continuous, and more expensive. In consequence of this the Foolish Pound was very greatly in request that morning, and the preacher grew bold as he petitioned for the double provision of sunshades made necessary by this wear-and-tear of local custom and blind prejudice. Only in one way, said he, could it be met: let those who customarily gave one pound (and he hung his head in the direction of the churchwarden, the amount of whose usual offertory was well known to the congregation), let those on this occasion give two pounds; let those who intended to give ten shillings give a pound; let the half-crown become five shillings; the florin four; the shilling two; the sixpence one; and if any one in that congregation had thought that so small a coin

as a threepenny-bit was an appreciable and deserving contribution towards sunshades for native Christians, then let them think better of the matter and make it sixpence. As for any miserable remnant that might be left, who had intended to give pennies, let them keep their pennies in their own pockets, and satisfy their consciences as best they could.

And while the preacher preached, the churchwarden listened, and thought to himself, "Ah, if I had only kept that bright farthing that I gave to the crossing-sweeper this morning, I could have put it in the plate underneath my pound, and made them look like two pounds: and what an example that would have been to the rest of the congregation! I have often thought that I was too hasty and indiscriminate in my charity; and here in consequence I have lost a great opportunity for doing good!"

Nevertheless his pound, he thought, would still make a respectable display; and when he handed the plate to the first row of pew-holders he laid down with a flourish the only coin that remained to him. It was bright and new, and it came tails up: otherwise he could not have believed his eyes. He wanted to go through the

floor there and then; for he knew that all down that aisle the congregation would be looking out to see whether he had given one pound, or two pounds, toward Christian coverings for naked little black boys, and would regulate their own gifts accordingly: and next he wanted to rush off and give the crossing-sweeper into custody; but of course that was not possible till after the Blessing.

The Wise Penny made a most extraordinary sensation. "After all," he said to himself, "it seems to me that I was right, and that on Sunday I have quite as much value and importance as a Foolish Pound has: else why does everybody look at me?"

His importance, indeed, was greater than he knew; for never did the naked little black boys have so few Christian sunshades to tear up as they had that year from the church to which the churchwarden and the Foolish Pound were in the custom of going to be worshipped.

But if you wish to know what meanwhile had become of the Foolish Pound, after it had fallen into the hands of the undeserving crossing-sweeper—well, this is what happened.

The crossing-sweeper did not wait until the

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churchwarden had gone more than a dozen yards. Then he looked at the Foolish Pound again and bit it to make quite sure that it was a real one: and then he picked up his broom and his three-legged stool, and silently as an Arab folds up his tent and departs, so silently and expeditiously did he decamp to another quarter of London altogether: and there he bought for himself a better crossing where more churchwardens went by every Sunday, capable some day of making exactly the same mistake through the same method of distributing their charity.

And then, a few months later, war broke out, and the Foolish Pound was withdrawn from circulation and turned into paper: so that was the end of him.

X: Winkiboo

EVERY day, at the same hour in the morning, Winkiboo saluted his mother honourably and set out from his poor hovel of a home, on his road to school. There was nothing in life that he less liked doing than that; and this, not because he was indolent, but because he was heavy of understanding; his skull was thick and his brain small and difficult to get at, so learning came hard to him.

And as he went each day along the path by the rice-fields and across the small channels thick with fennel and burdock, which carried water into all the surrounding country, he would repeat to himself the lessons he had to get ready, the spelling and the tables and the pieces of verse, conning them from the rough clay tablets that hung round his neck; but however often he repeated them it was no good at all; when he came into school and tried to remember them, he would find he had forgotten them all.

There was no doubt at all that he was the

greatest dunce in the school; almost all days the schoolmaster would beat him, trying to put a little sense into his head, but it was not the least good; even the smallest of the scholars would jeer and point at him because he was such a dunce.

They would do that not only in school, but out of school as well. Those who overtook him on the way, with their own lessons well learned and packed safe inside their self-satisfied little brains, would come round and laugh and interrupt his tardy efforts to master the task he had been set, "It is no use," they would cry; "why does Winkiboo try to learn, when he knows he must be whipped?"

Thus they gave him smaller chance than ever to escape the flogging they wished him. It was very amusing to see, however hard he might try, how sure he was not to escape a beating in one day out of two.

And the worst of it was that Winkiboo really wished to learn; so when his schoolfellows began regularly to hinder him, he took to going another way by a much worse road, which led through a tangled bit of wood wherein stood an old ruined temple with the

statue of Buddha, the calm peaceable god, still seated in its shade though no worshipper ever came near it now. "After all," thought he, "being a longer road it will give me more time than I get by the other way."

At first Winkiboo was a little afraid when he came within the shadow of the wood, for the place was overgrown and lonely, but before long he had got used to it, and would look up as he went by to see the god always sitting there with empty hands and the same quiet smile upon his face, not seeming to care what went on round him, or, for the matter of that, for what no longer went on.

In a little while, Winkiboo came to have quite a friendly feeling for the lonely deity sitting in a shrine that had fallen out of fashion; so on his way he would pull flowers, and as he went by he would stand on tip-toe and drop them into the god's lap as a remembrance. But he could never tell if the god cared at all for such things now, for his face wore always that same smile of a mind given, not to the outward things of the world, but inwardly to the things of the spirit. Winkiboo did not doubt that inside his black marble covering the god was very

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wise and knew many things that the rest of the world had forgotten long ago. There, then, was one who was far more wise than any school-master; and yet he always looked kindly and never seemed to upbraid.

Winkiboo soon came very much to prefer going by the longer and lonelier way, till at last his schoolfellows, never meeting him, would wonder what had become of him and how it was that he got to school at all. But though they questioned him, Winkiboo seemed to be dense, and would not say anything.

Now, there was something strange about Winkiboo's mind, for all that it was so slow at learning; it wasn't cleverness in the least, but it was a sort of hope that lived there and never quite died. Every morning, when he set out with his tablets to school, he would imagine that just for once he was going to get his lesson quite off by heart; and though the hope had failed him hundreds of times before, it was always the same again each morning, never any more and never any less. And always when he got as far as the ruined shrine, with the calm figure of the god seated within, holding its peace so wisely at all the world, always then

Winkiboo would think that he knew his lesson better than he had ever known it before, and would look up cheerfully and nod his head and cry, "O Thou!" as he threw up flowers to the god's knees before passing on his way. And while he did this he never remembered how the day before, and the day before that, and again the day before that, he had had quite the same idea and yet had not received one stroke the less when the event proved him as much a dunce as ever.

But one day when Winkiboo was starting on his road to school, carrying his clay tablets with him, he saw in the water-channel by the way some yellow irises, which seemed to him more beautiful than any he had yet brought and offered at the shrine; and as he stayed and reached over the stream to get them, suddenly the string that was about his neck snapped, and the three clay tablets that hung there fell off into the water and were drowned.

All his hope was gone.

Winkiboo had no heart to pick more than a single flower, for he knew for certain that none of his lessons would be learned that morning, and that his master would be sure to beat him

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worse than ever he had done before. He went on his way weeping.

And when he came to the shrine he reached up his hand and laid the yellow iris between the smooth black knees of the statue, saying nothing, because his heart was so heavy and had no hope left in it.

Then he turned to go on, when far up over his head he heard a soft slow voice saying, "O Thou!" It was the statue speaking to him! Winkiboo stood still as the rivet in a head man's coffin, wondering with his slow mind what next. "O Thou!" said the voice again, "what is it ails thee to-day?"

Winkiboo smudged the half-dried tears out of his eyes to make room for fresh ones, and began sobbing once more. "Getting this flower for you," he said, "I dropped my tablets into the stream, so now, as I cannot learn my lessons, I know I shall be beaten!"

He was about to start sobbing louder than ever, when he heard the statue overhead say, "Oh, no, you won't be."

"Won't I? Why not?" asked Winkiboo, still doubtful of the matter.

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"Climb up on to my knee," said the statue, "and I will show you."

Winkiboo climbed up with some difficulty, and when he had got so far safely, there, among the dried stalks of all the flowers he had brought on previous days, he saw three little clay tablets lying. He looked at them and there was no doubt about it; they contained the words and the numbers and the verses which he ought to have been getting by heart that morning.

"Sit where you are," said the statue, for Winkiboo was just going to snatch up the tablets and slip off again. "Sit where you are and read them once through, and I will then let you go."

So Winkiboo sat between the statue's knees and read the tablets once through. And no sooner had he done that than he found he knew them all by heart, forwards and backwards, and inside out and upside-down, and all ways imaginable. He was almost frightened to find himself possessing so much knowledge. "O Thou!" he cried in a great hurry, and slipping off the statue's knees, ran off as hard as he could to catch up the time that he had been losing.

In school that day, Winkiboo stood up unabashed and repeated his lesson without missing

a word. The schoolmaster could not believe his ears: he thought there must be some trick about it and tried to catch him tripping, by all the means that a schoolmaster knows so well. But Winkiboo tripped like a dewdrop on a blade of grass, or water on a duck's back, and rolled it out backwards, and upside-down and inside out with the ease of the nightingale when he is love-making. The whole school became silent with envy, dudgeon, and astonishment.

Winkiboo ran all the way home; and when he got there he sat down on the doorstep and cried because he was so happy. The way to learn his lessons had been revealed to him at last; and how easy it was!—simply to sit in the lap of an ancient and a wise god, whom other folks had forgotten, and at once the whole thing came like nature.

The next day, when he set out to school, he took with him a large bunch of yellow irises in grateful offering to his benefactor; and when he stood up in class he said his lesson just as well as he had done the day before, inside out, and upside-down, and hind before, without missing a word.

The big, clever, lazy, fat top boy of the school, whose name was Boh-boh, which means

chief, and who could only say his lessons in the ordinary straightforward way, grew ill with envy to hear him. And as soon as school was over, he got hold of Winkiboo and said to him: "Tell me what it is you have done to make yourself so clever all of a sudden. If you do not tell me I will do something that will make you wish yourself dead."

Winkiboo did not want to tell him at all. So what he said was this: "Take three hairs out of a cow's tail, and three quills off a hedgehog's back, and three bones out of a lizard's spine and swallow them; and when you have swallowed them you will be wiser than you are now."

Boh-boh believed him easily, and the next day he came to school looking very ill indeed. He did not know his lessons nearly so well as he ought to have done; Winkiboo surpassed him easily.

After school, Boh-boh said to Winkiboo, "Why did you tell me those things would make me wiser? They have only made me feel very ill."

"In that case," said Winkiboo, "they have made you wiser, because now you know they are not good for eating, and you would have known that before had you only been wiser."

When he heard that, Boh-boh became very angry and threatened to do all manner of things to Winkiboo if he would not tell him the true way to become wiser, and learn everything just as he now did.

“Well,” said Winkiboo, “the way to make yourself really wiser is this. Get a flea that has bitten a dog, that has bitten a cat, that has bitten a rat, that has bitten a mouse, that has bitten a piece of cheese that you have bitten; and when you have been bitten by that flea, then your mind will go round and round in circles and you will be wiser than you have ever been in your life before.”

The next day when Boh-boh came to school he was so exhausted he could hardly creep or sit up; he did worse than ever at his lessons, and by the time they were over where before he had been at the top he now found himself at the bottom.

So when school was over, Winkiboo, who was beginning to feel quite sorry for him, said, “Did you catch that flea?”

“Yes,” said Boh-boh, “and much good has it done me! It took a lot of catching I can tell you.”

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"Of course," said Winkiboo, "I could have told you that yesterday. You feel wiser now that you know it, do you not? And didn't the doing of it make you feel giddy?"

"Giddy!" cried Boh-boh, "why my brain has been going round in circles ever since!"

"That is just what I told you would happen," said Winkiboo. "Don't you feel wiser now than you have ever done in your life before?"

Then Boh-boh became greatly enraged, and he caught little Winkiboo up by the scruff of his neck and shook him, crying, "If you don't tell me how you have learned to grow wise all of a sudden as you have done, I will break every bone in your back. And if you play me one other trick like this, for that also I will break you when I next catch you."

So then Winkiboo said meekly and in great haste: "When I learn my lessons, I go and sit on the statue in the ruined shrine that is in the wood; and that is how I grow wiser."

When Boh-boh heard that, then truly he believed he had got to the secret of the whole business, so for the time he let Winkiboo go. And the next morning very early he went to the

wood where the statue lay, that he might sit on it and learn his lesson and regain the place that he had lost.

But as soon as Buddha, the calm god, saw the big, fat, lazy, clever boy coming to be taught of him, he fell softly forward upon his face, so that whereas he had formerly been seated, what before was lowest now came uppermost.

So Boh-boh, coming to the shrine and finding the image thus prostrate, climbed up and sat himself down back to back of the statue where he found things most convenient for sitting on.

But, oh, marvel! no sooner had he conned his lesson once through when he forgot it utterly; and when he got to school that day he received the due reward of his foolishness. While far away in the wood the solitary god sat up and smiled.

But as for Winkiboo his memory remained unimpaired, and his brain spread; and he became in course of time a paragon of learning, a fathomer of riddles, a trisector of triangles, a worker in logarithms, and a solver of acrostics: for between him and the statue there was a perfect understanding.

XI: The Talking Horse

“**B**UT at least thou hast seen the talking horse? No?” So they took Kamboogey down to the remoter parts of the waste, lying away from the town where, within a delved hollow of grassy mounds that had once been the site of an amphitheatre, lived the talking quadruped.

He talked with all save the lips, and articulations of speech; yet Balaam’s ass might have learned of him to be meek and lowly; for with head-waggings, and tail-twitchings, and arithmetical hoof-hammerings of the sod, he did all which came within the compass of a quadruped to do in pursuit of human flattery, and the coin that buys comfortable living.

“Who is the master of this wonder?” asked Kamboogey.

“Why, as for that,” said they, “he is his own; and has been through a lawsuit to maintain it: presenting documents in proof, and taking oath on them.”

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“How comes he to be here?”

“He is a fixture past reach of memory. This ground, now his freehold, belonged of old time to his master—one who died crazy, believing in the superiority of horse over man, and in man’s inferiority of soul to all other beasts that perish. For this, doubtless, he now burns; and yonder sack of bones stands a witness to the miserable downfall of his detestable philosophy.”

“Truly,” said Kamboogey, “the self-sufficient one seems to fare not well!”

“He? No; he is the greatest unborn ass that can be met with, so foolish is his simplicity. By his tricks he seems to touch human intellect; but in all else he manifests a God-sent inferiority. See now, yonder is our chief magistrate; he has brought down some people of importance who are passing through to show them the sight. There now, as you will see, he holds up a piece of bronze, and the horse, wagging his head, will have none of it: then silver, and he says it is too small: after, a bigger piece, and straightway his whole bag of tricks comes tumbling! Then, you mark, the beast advances his money-box for payment; and the chief magistrate drops him the bronze piece.”

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"What? The chief magistrate!" cried Kamboogey.

"'Waste not, want not,' is the motto of our city," replied the guide. "The beast has sufficient for its requirements."

"Yet, plainly I see yonder," said Kamboogey, "want knocking hard upon those old grey ribs!"

"Yonder also you see waste. He is a bad character and a spendthrift. After all, he has this enclosure, his own freehold; he can dung it, and dress it, and eat it. What more should he need?"

"Perhaps more kind fellowship," said Kamboogey; "he has a heart and intellect to sustain."

The horse had finished his tricks, and the chief magistrate had led away his guests. Kamboogey went and laid his hand between the beast's eyes, and held up to him a piece of gold. The horse looked at it and considered for a while; then walked round to see whether the other side were not hollow and counterfeit. Then he wagged his head with great emphasis; and without more waiting Kamboogey threw

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his gold piece into the box by the side of the chief magistrate's copper.

The citizen looking on said, "Now be two madmen got together!" and backing precipitately up the slope to look on from a safe distance. Presently he was running full tilt for the town, crying, "The talking horse is performing as never before; and there is a madman with him! Come, for it is worth it!"

Kamboogey, sitting on a knoll, smacked his lips at the wonderful unfolding of the beast's inner depths. "This is poetry!" he cried. "This is prayer! This is religion!" And the horse went on without stint, recalling the things he did in the days of his old master, before the memory of present men.

In a while the skirts of the town were overspread with the rumour, and the chief magistrate himself came running back to have sight of the news. "I beseech thee now stop!" cried Kamboogey to the horse; "I would not have him see this in exchange for the beggarly coin with which he has cheated thee." So the horse stopped just as all the eyebrows of the inhabitants began lifting over the crest of the circumferent mounds.

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“Why, thou wonder!” cried Kamboogey, and had no more breath left in him for praise. The horse gave him two kind glances, even three: but there was a hungry look in him, as though he wished to get away to some place where lay the desire of his heart. “We shall meet again,” said Kamboogey, and turned to break his way through the crowd which was now gathered; but the horse made haste to follow close after him.

The money clattered in the alms-dish that hung round the grey neck. One of the crowd peeped in, and snipped his breath, crying: “Gold! As I live, there is gold in the old beast’s pot!”

“It is that new fellow’s, the stranger’s!” cried the one who had run with the news. “Madman he must be, as I told you!”

The crowd laughed and roared. “Oh, he’s new, he’s new! He thinks the old horse has a head for money! Go, and see for yourself, master stranger; only follow him!”

It was with some pains that Kamboogey prevailed upon the horse to take the lead; but after gentle urgings, and seeing that his new friend did not mean to abandon him, the animal went

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to the front, and ambled quite definitely on some way of his own: turning his head solicitously now and again to see whether Kamboogey were following, and slackening if there seemed to be inconvenience in his speed.

The show having come to an apparent end the crowd dropped off. "They are a couple!" said the citizen who had carried the news. "I should not wonder if more came of this."

The talking horse stopped under an inn-sign, and rattled his pannikin. Presently the innkeeper appeared carrying a small bowl of thin ale. At sight of that the beast's head went wagging a negative, and the innkeeper, surprised, cried, "What, has a silver-piece been dropped to him by mistake? Does the beast demand a bucket?" He looked into the pot, and, seeing the gold, snapped it up, speechless. Then he ran in, and came forth again, this time bearing a bucket of ale. But for the whole of that gold-piece the innkeeper presented the horse with no change; nay, had even taken to himself the chief magistrate's penny into the bargain.

Kamboogey, beholding the horse turn away satisfied, believing himself well requited,

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"Why, thou scurvy cheat," he cried to the innkeeper, "thou rapscallion and low pilferer! Where is the change thou owest this poor beast for the piece of gold thou hast had from him?"

"That is my affair not thine!" retorted the innkeeper.

"Nay, it is mine!" cried Kamboogey, "for the gold-piece was mine; and I will see to it that he gets from thee the worth of it."

The innkeeper grumbled, with a wry face, "How was I to know he had a man lord for his friend?" And he fetched forth the change from his pocket with all the ill-will in the world.

When the money came rattling into his pannikin the talking horse threw up his heels into the air, and snuffed the wind this way and that, as who should say, "Which way to the nearest brewery?"

"Nay," said Kamboogey, "make thyself at ease here, and I will see that the bargain is kept fair." And he ordered out good beer at so much a gallon, paying out what was right from the beast's pannikin.

Before long he became anxious at the consumption that took place; he took the horse by

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the mane. "Thou art fuddled," he said: "come thy way!" But the beast stood planted, demanding more gallons by the rattling of his money-box.

So long as a rattle was in it, there was no moving him. Till Kamboogey, out of pure kindness was driven into cheating him; and over the last gallon gave him not back his change. He put that into his pocket, turning to go; and like a lamb, except that his gait was more uncertain, the old horse turned and frisked after him.

"Nay," said Kamboogey, "thou canst frisk; but canst thou do one of thy tricks?" And the horse swore by all fours that he could; but he could not.

"Now, take shame to thyself," cried Kamboogey, "that thou canst not accept generosity without making a beast of thyself and becoming a burden upon me! Lest thou fall into a ditch and die in two feet of water, I have to see thee home!" "Also I have become purse-bearer to this ancient," said he to himself: "how shall I ever be rid of him?"

Indeed it was a question he asked himself many times that day. If ever he saw love in an

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animal's eyes, he saw it for himself in those of that maudlin beast, and he had not enough stone in his heart to drive the creature off.

Therefore, for the whim, and being a student of the things God sends, he brought his tent and pitched it in the green hollow, which was freehold, where the talking horse made a livelihood by his performances. And truly to Kamboogey the beast unfolded the depths of its soul.

It takes too long to say by what signs the creature released itself in uncouth symbols so as to be understood: yet truly, except with lips and uttered words, it talked: and before the day was out Kamboogey had heard the greater part of its history.

In the morning when Kamboogey rose from sleep he found himself already watched and waited for. He lay on the slope, and the talking horse had its eye on him, as though he were a piece of quicksilver that would break or run away if you touched it.

Kamboogey began not to be sure whether this were not the thin end of slavery: so he sat up, and, saluting the talking horse, said, "We two be equals and friends: thou art not bound, and I am not bound. So long as we keep camp to-

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gether, go thou thy way and I will go mine." To make more sure of it Kamboogey returned him such coin as was still his due after the orgy of the day previous; and, to profit by the hours of the sun, started to go his own ways.

Very presently it became evident that, however far he were to go, Kamboogey's ways were also the beast's ways; and though at certain turnings that led towards signboards, qualms of a divided mind took hold of the four-footed one, he failed not all day in faithfulness to his new-found comrade. Such abstemiousness, with silver pieces clanking all the while in his pannikin, had not been his before: and, truly, to his appetite the day seemed long.

At night Kamboogey returned to camp and the horse followed into the grassy hollow which was his lair. But so soon as Kamboogey was lain down and had let forth his first snore, the talking horse was off to melt his silver at the nearest inn into the liquor his soul loved. He came back more drunk than a lord: and was that still when Kamboogey sat up in the morning beams and reproached him.

Now Kamboogey, though it be granted he was a good man and kind in the ways of earth,

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in moral matters was a meddler: and he began to bethink him that he had not that grip of his companion's moral system which should give him altitude in the eyes of the world. "I," said he, "who have avoided the fellowship of all sots and swine that suppose themselves to be men, am fallen into friendship with a sot that supposes itself to be a horse: truly, I am laughed at!"

Therefore he sat up and spoke, and the other listened.

"Thou beast," said he, "this friendship of ours is passed beyond a joke. It behoves me therefore to consider thy moral welfare!"

"And me thine!" answered the horse.

"Thine is sufficient for the occasion," replied Kamboogey with some asperity, "when thou seest me fall in like manner thy opportunity will have come. If thou lovest me, the money I have given thee thou wilt avoid spending in ways which displease me. So know, that in thee strong drink displeases me: since by that I am brought into disrepute likewise; and I wish not again to behold or remember thy shameless shamblings of yesterday and the day previous."

The horse was meekness itself, and led an-

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other abstemious day in his friend's company: and Kamboogey's heart was tender and his ear friendly to the accompanying sound of those four feet that continued to come after him wherever he went. So that, at starting, he would say, "Thou comest, too?" and at returning, "Thou returnest my way?" And the beast came and returned with all willingness, to be within reach of the mere sound of his voice.

Meantime the talking horse was spending such of Kamboogey's coins as were left to him with insipid foolishness, so that Kamboogey marvelled to see the litter of uselessness that strewed the grass of their enclosure. Yet with pain and cogitation the good beast had, in three days, rid himself of that incubus of virtue which the remnants of his friend's generosity had put upon him.

So the first night of freedom, while his friend slept, he went off to town to sell his tricks: and using that wisdom which a little kindly guidance had taught him, he was able to rake in so much coin that he came back again to his own more drunk than a lord.

When Kamboogey saw his condition he was in great wrath: not a word would he speak as he

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went out of camp to the disgraceful beast who waited meekly the friendly signal for following. So all day he went lonely, and the horse followed a great way off, eyeing him wistfully from hill to hill.

At Kamboogey's return the horse awaited him with puzzled contrition: "Kamboogey," said he, explaining himself by signs, "it was my money, not thine, wherewith I turned myself loose on drink last night. May I not do what I like with my own?"

"Not," said Kamboogey, "if thou goest *my* way. Go thine own, hog, and do as thy soul wishes: but wallow not in my company, lest I be made an object by complicity!"

So that faithful friend, finding that their two tastes clashed, fell again on abstemiousness for the sake of comradeship.

Now, it happened about that time that Kamboogey had become dazzled under the light of a fair woman's eye—a very moon of maidens she was: and whatsoever to her seemed good, to him seemed good also. And this is true that a wise man says, "We are blind to the roots that are in us." Therefore, when Kamboogey's maiden shut her eyes at him, the whole world

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became changed. He saw neither sun, nor stars, nor moon: and still while that blackness was about him his friend the talking horse kept faithful company with him, abstaining from strong drink.

Presently a ray shone in his darkness: "Wine is good," it said, "and maketh the sorry heart glad." Therefore Kamboogey took wine: and presently, in pursuing illusions of happiness, he became a sot.

The friendly beast looked on wondering: "He takes wine; for him it is good. But he likes not that I should take it, for fear lest he be made that 'object.'" So while Kamboogey drank, the talking horse sat and abstemiously looked on.

In a little while Kamboogey had not legs to fetch his own drink: so his beast-friend fetched it for him. With such frequency and liberality and punctuality did he fetch it, that, presently, of his comfortable ministrations Kamboogey died.

It was just at that point that the beast's intellect failed him. People came and carried away his friend, without explaining to the talking horse what death meant. So he remained

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alone, wondering whether one day the other would not walk in again cured—or, at least, having once more the unsteady use of his legs.

And always after that he kept from the wine or ale that Kamboogey had forbidden him: “Lest,” said he, “one day Kamboogey should return, and find me drunk, and so be shamed.”

Thus, through inferiority of intellect the horse became sober; from which it may be inferred by any who choose, that through his superiority of intellect alone does a man become drunk.

XII: "Means to an End"

THERE was once a man who lived on a hill, and his name was John, and at the bottom of that same hill lived a woman, and her name was Jenny. So they were called by their neighbours John of the Hill, and Jenny of the Dingle: and for all that they lived so near each other, and every day, or most days, passed along the same road, they did not know or speak to each other, but only looked and thought. For John was shy of all women, and Jenny was shy of him: and the nearer they lived to each other the more distant they seemed to grow, and the more they thought of each other when apart, the more shy they became on meeting. Often, as they passed each other on the road, John tried to say "Good morning," for a beginning, but the words stuck in his throat and would not come.

Now, if he had only said it the first time it might have been easy, but once the opportunity had been missed the word got harder and harder to utter, till at last it had become impossible.

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"If he wished to know me," said Jenny to herself, "surely he would speak to me." And "If she wished to know me," said John to himself, "surely she would look at me." But except when out of sound or behind each other's backs, they did neither of these things: and all the time they were eating their hearts out to find a way that they might get to know each other. The thing was so easy; and that is what made it so difficult.

Jenny had a goat which she used to tether by the wayside, so that without cost to herself it might feed on the grass which grew there, for she had no field of her own. But John of the Hill had a field—a fine field which grew more grass than he knew what to do with, and one day, greatly daring, biding his time till Jenny was out of the way, John brought down from the hill a great pitchfork full of hay, and threw it down where the tethered goat could get at it. But though he thought to do it behind her back, and so set her wondering who it could have been that had given her the hay gratis, Jenny saw him with the tail of her sharp eye, and, "Oh!" thought she, "is it scraping acquaintance with my goat that ye're after, when ye won't

even make mine? None of that, Mr. John of the Hill!” And as soon as ever his back was turned, she took the goat, leaving the bundle of hay untouched, and tethered her elsewhere.

It was a sore blow to John when he came by again shortly after (as you may be sure that he did), to find the hay left lying, and the goat gone. It made him so down of heart that for some weeks after he did nothing at all. Yet all the while, if he could only have perceived it, Jenny was making signals that would have melted the heart of any understanding man. But John of the Hill had been so shaped that he didn’t understand; and still, as they passed each other, neither of them could find a word to say.

But one day Jenny hit on a great device. She got linen and flannel and worsted, and of these she made a complete set of the clothes which a man wears inside his buttons—a linen shirt, a woollen vest, a pair of drawers, and two pairs of socks, of a different colour, so as to hit the eye from a distance: and every week on washing-day when she washed her own things, she dipped these also in the tub, wrung them out, and hung them on the line to dry.

The first time John went by, and saw that

double set of washing blowing itself dry in the wind, he had the greatest shock of his life—till then. "And what fat reptile of a fellow has she got in the house with her now?" cried he, all aghast at time lost and opportunity gone; and when he went on down into the village, he asked of everybody he met who the blamed fool could be that Jenny of the Dingle had gone and made marry her. But nobody could tell him who it was, or believed that such a person could exist.

For a week or two after that, little enough work did John do, and little sleep he got either, for all day long, and half into the night, and up before dawn, he lay on the top of his bean-stack and kept watch upon Jenny's door, to see who the man was that owned the linen shirt, and the woollen vest, and the flannel drawers, and the two pair of socks that were not of a colour.

But though he wore himself to a shadow trying, never a glimpse could he get of the man who had been beforehand and got in ahead of him; so at last he began to think that the man didn't rightly exist, but was only expected. "Maybe," he said to himself, "she just found

them lying by the road; and hangs them up there every week so that the rightful owner may know they are there for the asking, if so be he should happen to pass. And anyway,” he said with a sigh, “they are not mine.”

Then one day a bright idea came to him; and he got out from his own store, a shirt, and a woollen vest, and a pair of drawers, and two pair of socks, not of a colour—all of them as full of air-holes as the best barn wall in the country—for John, you will remember, had no woman on tap to mend for him—and he laid them all out like a row of beggars by the wayside till Jenny should come by and look at, and maybe take them in and give them a place on the line till their owner should come and claim them.

Sure enough Jenny did—at least so far as the coming and the looking went. But when she saw them so full of holes and beyond decent wear or reasonable mending, she thought—or she chose to think—they had been laid out for some kind Christian person to come along and bury them. And that is what she did; for a more naked set of underwear she had never set eyes on in all her born days.

When John went by and saw that the clothes

had disappeared, instead of being left lying like his bundle of hay, he had his hopes and on the Monday morning he lay on the top of his bean-stack and watched Jenny wringing out the clothes from the wash-tub with the greatest expectation and delight. But before long he came to the sad conclusion that a woman's washing had been too much for them, and that they had all gone to lather and elbow-grind.

John was sad for the loss of his clothes, for he had not many changes to spare, and you could look at the landscape through any of them, but though he had not yet found his tongue for the making of Jenny's acquaintance, he had begun doing things, so there was hope for him.

Nor, for her part, did Jenny stay idle. She knew now well enough that John was watching her; and now every night as soon as she had drawn the blind, she set a dummy with the shape of a man's head to it between the lamp and the window; and having put it in a rocking chair, she would set it going with her foot, so that, from the shadow on the blind, the dummy seemed to be shaking its head at her and laying down the law—man-like.

Now when John of the Hill saw that, though he had never seen a man go in or a man go out, there at all events he had got him. And so, to attract his attention and make him come out and face him, he began throwing stones down the chimney.

The first stone went into the soup that Jenny was making for her own lone supper. But when others followed she reckoned well enough who was paying her the compliment, and why; so she just rocked her dummy man a bit the harder, and putting the lid on the saucepan, let the stones go on rattling against its sides, without paying further attention.

John of the Hill was all put out of his reckoning by this; for why Jenny, or the man she had got in with her, had not come out to put a stop to the disturbance, he could not for the life of him make out—it seemed so contrary to reason.

He came to the conclusion at last that the man was either a disreputable character who couldn't afford to show himself, or too great a coward to face one of his own size. So having gone home to think over the matter, the next day he said to the man that did odd jobs for

him—a smaller-sized man than himself—“If you will go and throw three stones down Jenny of the Dingle’s chimney while she’s cooking her midday dinner I’ll give you a whole week’s wages.” After some haggling the odd-jobber promised that for half money down and half afterwards he would take the risk of doing it.

Sure enough he went, and John of the Hill lay in hiding round a corner to watch how he fared at the business. But no sooner had he thrown one stone, than Jenny, catching sight of him through the window and finding that after all it was not *her* man who was doing it, ran out with a broom-handle and gave him such a belabouring for his pains that three weeks’ wages would not have paid for it. “And what on earth,” she said at last when she paused to fetch breath, “what on earth were ye doing it for?”

“I was only doing it,” said the odd-jobber, “because John of the Hill told me; and paid me, as I thought, well for it. But a worse-paid job than this never have I come after!”

He went off rubbing his aches and bemoaning his bad fortune, and Jenny of the Dingle turned indoors again, with enough in her head to think about. And so pleased was she that she

determined for that night's supper to give herself a treat and have pancakes.

John, for his part, was full of envy for the opening that had fallen to his odd-jobber; if only Jenny would come out at him in the same way, all on the spur of the moment, they might fall into conversation before they knew, and so at last make each other's acquaintance. So, screwing his courage to sticking-point, he filled his pocket with stones and went down that same evening and began throwing them down her chimney. Now, Jenny was frying her pancakes, and you can't do that with the lid on; so at the spoiling of the first pancake up she jumped and ran out at the door, and, before she could see who it was, had cried, "What are ye doing that for?"

And then she saw all at once that it was John of the Hill himself: and there she had gone and spoken, and stood expecting an answer.

"I was doing it for you," said John of the Hill, explaining all he knew how.

"For me!" said Jenny of the Dingle. "What do I want with stones down my chimney when I am frying pancakes?"

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"They were wishing-stones," said John, still trying to explain.

"And what might they be wishing for?" inquired Jenny, beginning to feel now very much at her ease on the texts with which he provided her.

"Wishing that you'd come out and speak to me about it," explained the other reasonably, "and tell me whether you wished me to go on with it or not."

"Go on with it!" cried Jenny. "Why should I want you to go on with it?"

John found that hard to explain. "You see," he said at last, "it's all through you that I lost a good suit of clothes—underwear, I mean: and I sort of wanted to know what you had done with them?"

"Buried them," said Jenny.

"What did you do that for?" asked John.

"Because I'd got a better pair—set, I should say—waiting for you here."

"What!" cried John, astonished, "were those clothes on the line waiting for me, then?"

"Who else should they be waiting for?" said Jenny. "Every time I hung 'em up didn't

you keep your eyes on 'em hard enough to wear holes in 'em?"

"I was trying to size up the man they belonged to," said John.

"And he was a bigger fool than you ever thought of looking for!" said Jenny with kind neighbourly contempt.

Just then John caught a smell from indoors. "That pancake is burning," said he, and pointed, hoping to divert attention from himself.

"Then you'd better come in and eat it," said she: "for if it's burnt the fault is yours. But take care that ye don't eat the stone ye put in it."

So John went in, quite meek and subdued and domestic and ready to be fed; and there, no sooner had he crossed the threshold than he saw the dummy sitting propped up on a chair by the hearth.

"Why, whatever's that?" said he.

"Toasted cheese," said Jenny. "Things I use when I have to catch rabbits."

John lifted the dummy out of the chair and sat down in it himself; while Jenny took off and set before him the pancake, which, after all,

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was not much burnt: so, after picking out the stone which lay in its middle, he ate it, saying modestly, “This is good enough for the likes of me.”

“You look comfortable,” said Jenny, regarding him smoothly, with the motherly eye of a woman whose affections have had time to set.

“I was never of deceptive appearances,” said John.

“You *were!*” said Jenny with emphasis; and the weight of her words made John’s mind travel back over the past history of their courtship.

“And to think,” said he at last, in the tone of a man who has done economically and well, “to think that all this has come of a little stone-throwing!”

“To think!” said Jenny of the Dingle. “If that’s a man’s way of *thinking*, the Lord save us from men of brains!”

XIII: A Landlord and His Rent

THE woodman's wife, doing her duty by King and country, was producing a large family, two or three at a time, and bringing up more of them.

"If things go on like this," she said to her husband one day, "we shall want a new house, and you'll have to find it for us. I haven't time for the job myself."

"Houses aren't so easy to find in these days," said the woodman, "and bigger house, bigger rent. Where's the money to come from?"

"That's a thing babies never stop to inquire about," replied his wife. "A swallow waits till it finds a roof to build under; but children—. You've just got to roof 'em, whether or no; so you'd better be ready beforehand. I give you fair warning."

The woodman, seeing that his wife meant what she said, began house-hunting the very next day. He hunted—as you and I have done for weeks and months—without any success whatever; sitting tenants were in the way, and

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landlords asked rents which were equal to a king's ransom.

For a while he put off telling his wife of his bad luck, knowing that she would only scoff at him; but at last, in despair, he owned up. "I've looked everywhere," he said, "and there isn't a house to be had."

"Looked!" cried his wife. "What good have ever you done by looking? Shut your eyes, throw your shoes over your left shoulder, and follow them; and if they don't show more sense than you've done, I'll eat 'em!"

The woodman, being at his wits' end, did as his wife told him. He shut his eyes, threw his shoes over his left shoulder, and then, as he opened his eyes again, and saw his shoes disappearing into the wood, he followed them.

After an hour, sure enough, they led him to a house big enough for the needs of his growing family. The door was open, so in he walked; and there by the fire sat an old man in a chair, stirring the embers with his stick, but except for him and his chair the house contained nothing at all.

The woodman asked the old man whether the house were to let. "You mean you want it?"

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said the old man. "I do," said the woodman, "badly. I've got a growing family, and a wage that has stopped growing. What can you let me have it for?"

"I don't want to turn out my furniture," said the old man. "If I let you have the house the furniture has got to stay."

"I don't see any furniture," said the woodman, puzzled.

"The chair I'm sitting in," replied the other. "If you make that welcome at fireside and table, and always set a plate for it and a fair meal, you can have the house as long as you want it."

You need not doubt that to such terms the woodman agreed readily. He went back and told his wife of all that had happened to him, and the next day they and the growing family moved into their new home. There they found the chair waiting for them, but the old man was gone.

And so, according to the bargain, when they sat round the fire the empty chair was given a place; and when they sat down to a meal a plate with a portion of meat was put in front of it; and when the meal was over the portion went

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back into the pot, and the wife, as she scraped the plate, would laugh, and say, "We give him his meal, but he never comes for it. I used to think I'd married the biggest fool in the world, but I seem to have missed him by one."

The thought gave both of them a certain measure of contentment; things went well with them, and the family continued to grow.

And then it happened one day that, when the woodman's wife was scraping, for the thousand-and-first time, the plate from which no meal had been eaten, she said to herself, "Why do I go on giving myself the trouble of setting a plate and washing it like this day after day? There's no sense in it."

So the next meal, though the chair still stayed in its place by the table, she put no plate before it, and no food; and with one less plate to wash, and no one the worse for it, the woodman's wife was well pleased with herself, thinking how, behind her husband's back, she had made better of the bargain, for she had it well fixed in her mind that of the two she was much the cleverer.

That same evening came a knock at the door, and an old beggar asking for food. But the

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woodman's wife turned him away. "I've too many mouths to feed here," she said, "to spare keep for beggars."

The next day, when she and the growing family sat at their midday meal, one of the children began to complain. "Mother," he said, "something's the matter with my spoon. I keep on filling it, but when I put it into my mouth it's empty."

"That's because you are spilling it: eating too fast," said his mother. But no sooner had she started to show him how to hold his spoon than another of the children began making the same complaint. And they were the two who sat to right and left of the empty chair; nor did they stop complaining, the one or the other, till the meal was over.

And the same thing happened the next day, and the next.

The woodman's wife did not say anything to her husband. Having thought to better his bargain she would not go back upon it now and own herself beaten. So the next day when she laid the table for the midday meal, she did not set the empty chair as she had been used to do, but left it by the wall.

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But hardly had she helped the growing family to its food when "scrape, scrape!" came a noise upon the floor, and there was the chair pulling itself out from the wall toward the table, back to its old place.

This made her only the more resolved not to be beaten. Bringing her plate with her, she went across from her own chair to the empty one, and sat down on it. "There can't be two in the same place," she said to herself. "I am not going to be beaten by a chair!" and as this time none of the children complained, she thought to have got her own way; but when presently she went back to the dish to give them their second helping she found that it was almost empty.

When the woodman returned home that night his wife was in a bad temper. The house, with which for three years she had been well contented, no longer pleased her. She abused him for ever having found it, and for having brought her to it; but when he asked for her reason she would not tell him.

She had it in her mind to tell him later, perhaps; but not till she had proved herself mistress in her own house, for on this she was quite

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fixed—she was not going to be beaten by a chair. “After all,” she said to herself, “the law’s on my side. I’m the sitting tenant now; he can’t turn me out, and he can’t raise the rent.

So the next day, before the family meal, she took a rope and tied the chair to the wall. “What will he do now?” she said to herself; and for a few minutes, while she helped the children to their food, she was quite pleased with herself, thinking how clever she had been.

Then, all at once, the table, as though it were being pulled, began moving toward the empty chair, upsetting backwards, as it did so, one-half of the growing family, while the other half it left stranded in the middle of the room.

This was more than she could stand. She jumped up, and she got the wood-chopper, and, untying the chair from the wall, she carried it out into the backyard and began chopping it to pieces.

She started on the back, but hardly had she dealt it a blow when down came the kitchen chimney; at the second, all the glass broke in the windows; and, at the third, the children came running to say that the front door had tumbled from its hinges.

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The woodman's wife stopped her depredations. She regarded the chair with hostile respect. "So you've beat me, have you?" she said. "Anyway, you aren't a chair any longer; you are only a stool."

She carried the backless chair back into the house, set it to the table, put a plate in front of it, and on the plate a large portion of the family meal. Hardly had she done so when there came a knock at the door—a thing which much surprised her—and when she turned there was the door standing again in its place.

Outside stood the same old beggar man who had come before. He asked for food. "Come in," said the woodman's wife, "sit down there and help yourself." She was getting to be wiser now.

So the old man came in and sat in the empty chair, and began eating. He ate through one helping, he ate through two, he ate through three, he ate till the dish was empty, and the woodman's wife went on helping him, saying nothing.

"Mother," said one of the children, "all the windows have got mended again. Whoever can have done that?"

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"I done it, of course," said the woodman's wife. "Who else? I know how to mend windows once I'm shown the way."

As the old man went out he met the woodman returning from his work.

"Hallo, landlord!" cried the woodman, much surprised, "what have you come for?"

"I've been collecting the rent," said the old man, "and seeing to a few repairs." And with these words he was gone.

"Repairs!" exclaimed the woodman. "Wife, what for did you let him put that great new chimney on the house, three stories high, like a factory stack?"

"So as to make the fire draw better," said his wife. She wasn't going to give herself away to him. A bargain's a bargain, and I gave him three big helpings of meat for doing it. Here! don't go hanging round here doing nothing. Just you take that chair and mend it for me."

The woodman looked at the chair. "So you've broke its back, have you?" he remarked.

"Broke its back, indeed!" exclaimed his wife, scornfully. "It almost broke mine! You go on and mend it, as I've told you. I've took a sort of liking to that chair."

XIV: The Family Fairy

THERE was once upon a time a fairy who had acted all her life as providence and family adviser to the royal house of a certain country. She attended to all the births, marriages, and coronations in the direct line that took place; and her gifts on those occasions were either valuable or costly, as the case might be.

Generally she did everything that could be asked for or wished; but to this rule of benevolence there had been some unhappy exceptions. The reason was that this family fairy, the offspring of a mixed marriage, was obliged to take after her parents, and, good one day, was bad the next. When she was good, she was good as gold, as her fairy mother had been; but when she was bad, she took after her fairy father, and was as bad as blanks, just as he had been. Nobody was more grieved at this than the family fairy herself. Every alternate day of her life she would sit and cry over her sins of yesterday;

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but directly midnight came she would get up and laugh, and go on still farther in wickedness.

It was very lucky that she was unable on her bad days to undo all the good done in her periods of virtue; but it was equally unfortunate that, however repentant, she was never able to recall the wrong she had once effected.

Still, since christenings, coronations and marriages are movable feasts, she was, to all intents and purposes, a good fairy, and was much sought after at the court on all festive occasions—things being so arranged as to make them take place on days when her goodness was golden.

Her judicious and abounding acts of benevolence on behalf of her royal protégés were the theme and admiration of all who witnessed them. She was the first of that new dispensation of fairies which, in place of material, bestowed moral benedictions. And if there were at times hankerings after the old order of things—gifts of beauty, wealth, power, and such-like—there could be no doubt that substantial benefits came from such endowments as goodness, wisdom, courage, generosity, and humility.

The Family Fairy

Under her protection the royal line flourished, and made itself beloved by all.

During her bad times she was never invited to the court; for those days strict orders had been issued against her admission within the palace precincts.

In all this, on her good days, the family fairy acquiesced—indeed, she had herself instigated it as a safeguard; but on her other days she raged against the indignity thus put upon her. She even made elaborate pitfalls and plots of vengeance; but in her good moments she always betrayed herself to the king and queen, so that means might be taken to circumvent her.

Thus it came about that ever since she began to preside over the fortunes of the family, few ill-effects had been felt from the alternations of her character. But a day came—and with it came the beginning of the end, a thing now to be told of.

How it happened was never quite known; a crowd of court functionaries, all putting the blame on each other's backs, failed to elucidate the truth; but the fact was established. A new king had recently come to the throne; and a royal bride being chosen for him, the marriage

The Family Fairy

was fixed to take place. Whose fixing it was that made it come about on one of the family fairy's wrong days was never to be known. Some said Leap-year was responsible, others that the fairy herself, by maliciously remaining good on one of her bad days, disturbed the sequence of her changes. However that might be, she came to the wedding looking as good as gold, but hiding all the time a temper as bad as blanks.

When the time came for the offering of the wedding gifts, all waited for the benevolent fairy to speak first, the courtiers standing round with hands up, ready to applaud. She waved her wand over the royal pair with the gentlest of smiles.

"Your majesties," said she, "shall be the most forgetful couple that have ever existed since the world went round."

The whole court screamed with horror. The queen began to cry; but before her tears had reached the end of her nose she forgot what she was crying for, and left off to laugh.

So the family fairy departed in murky triumph, and spent the next day weeping her-

The Family Fairy

self ill all over, on account of the dreadful fate she had brought on her special pet royalties.

Indeed, now their misfortunes had begun. The king and queen were constantly forgetting themselves; the king would forget that he was married, but as the queen forgot to be jealous that hardly mattered. Sometimes they forgot each other entirely; it would take the court days and days to remind them of their position in life, and their mutual relations. The family fairy came and paid them visits of condolence, and wrung her hands over their lapses of memory; and then, on her bad days, she would go home and laugh, and calculate what a brood of misfortunes should presently spring from the curse she had so successfully implanted.

Now, in course of time, the queen gave birth to a daughter, and the christening day was to be fixed; but both she and the king had altogether forgotten which were the fairy's good days and which were her bad. The king said they were the odd days of the week, and the queen said they were the evens. To settle the matter they asked the fairy to call, "quite quietly; only ourselves, you know; don't dress!"—which meant

The Family Fairy

that the fairy was to leave her wand behind her.

So the fairy came unceremoniously, looking just as good as gold. She was charmed to see the baby princess, and talked of all the good things she would give her when the christening day came.

The queen, convinced that this was one of the fairy's good days, made a note of the date, and from that the christening day was fixed.

Now, this was just what the fairy in her artfulness had devised, when she came pretending to be so good and gracious in her intentions towards the royal infant. So at the christening she came and waved her wand over the princess, crying: "She shall be the most disobedient child that was ever born alive into this wicked world!" And saying this she vanished, leaving the whole court plunged in grief.

As the princess grew out of babyhood she became the most abnormally disobedient child that ever was known. Everything she was told not to do she did, and everything she was told to do she didn't.

The family fairy came and cried her eyes out over the deed she had done. "Only one thing can you do," she said, "to remedy such a state of

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affairs. Always tell the princess to do the exact opposite of what you really wish."

"That is all very well," said the queen; "but I so often forget what it is I really want her to do; and, put me round a corner like this, and it's like algebra. I shall never remember which way—the thing turns inside out when I want it to be outside in."

Nevertheless, except to her father and mother, the princess became, through the fairy's device, a very model of obedience.

In course of time the queen gave birth to a son, and there was great rejoicing over the arrival of an heir to the throne. One day, a little before the christening, the family fairy arrived in tears.

"I have come," said she, "to make a sacrifice of myself, and to prove how devoted I am to your welfare. I am grieved to say that I have been plotting horribly to get the christening fixed for a wrong day, so that I may work my wicked will on your second child as I did on your first. I cannot control myself when I am bad, and there is no knowing what I may do; therefore I mean to put myself beyond my own power. See, here is a box magic- and spell-

The Family Fairy

proof. To-night, before midnight, I will get into it; and when you have locked it, do not open it for twenty-four hours. Thus you will have my wicked self under lock and key; and, meanwhile, get on and be ready for the christening to take place.”

So at midnight the queen locked the fairy in the box (leaving the key for fear she should forget where she put it), and began to hurry on the preparations for the christening. She said to her daughter, “Whatever you do, you are not to think of not going to try not to undo that box!” and went away quite pleased with herself for remembering just for once how to get her daughter to not do what was not wanted. So she thought: and her mind was quite easy.

It took the princess half an hour to undo all the nots; then she got up and went to the chest. Inside she heard a poor little voice crying, “Let me out; let me out! I am so good!” So, as her mother had forbidden her to do it, she unlocked the chest and threw up the lid.

Out came the family fairy, looking quite good. “When is the christening?” she asked.

“Dear me!” said the queen, coming upon her. “I quite forgot I had let you out again. Then

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this is your good day again? We will make the christening the day after to-morrow. You won't mind going back into the box again for one night?"

"No," said the fairy; "not in the least. Only you had better let me tell the princess about not opening it."

So all that day the fairy went about looking as good as gold, and at night she got into the box and was locked up.

"Be sure," the fairy had said to the princess, "that directly the queen has locked me in, you come and let me out again!" And the princess had wagged her disobedient little tongue and said, "Yes, fairy; I will do what you tell me."

The queen had heard the fairy say this, and she thought to herself, "Did she say it right, or did she say it wrong? Well," thought she, "to make it quite safe I will put the box where nobody but myself can find it; then, whether the princess means to be obedient or disobedient, no harm can come of it."

The fairy inside the box was laughing to herself, for it was her bad day, and she had deceived everybody. "To-morrow," she said, "is my good day, and I shall be locked up, so that

I can't go and tell tales about myself, and the next day is the christening, and I shall get let out." And she began thinking to herself what was the wickedest, most awful gift she could give to the poor baby prince. And then it was midnight, so that suddenly she became quite good again.

"Oh, let me out; let me out!" cried the poor fairy. "This is my good day! Let me out, or I shall be doing dreadful things at the christening to-morrow!"

But the queen had put her away in the most secret of hiding-places, and nobody heard her; and of course the disobedient little princess never came to look for her.

At the little prince's christening all went happily. The godfathers and godmothers had brought gold mugs, and forks, and spoons.

Presently the courtiers began asking, "But where is the family fairy?" The question went from mouth to mouth, and grew louder and louder till it reached the royal ears.

"The what?" said the king.

"The which?" said the queen.

"The family fairy!" cried the courtiers.

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The king and queen looked at each other, and shook their heads. "But we don't remember any one of that name!" said they.

"And even if I did," murmured the queen, "I'm sure I have forgotten where I put her!"

XV: Kill or Cure

SEMOLINA was the eldest of a very large and a very poor family. It was poor because of its size—its numbers, that is to say, having far too many mouths for the food to go round into. And the larger it grew the poorer it became; there seemed no help for it.

Year by year babies kept coming, though Semolina did everything she could to warn them away. Whenever she heard that her mother was expecting one (and the notice she got of it was generally rather short) she would write out a poster in large copybook hand, and pin it up on the front door. “House full!” “No room!” “Gone away!” “No more babies wanted!” were some of the devices by which she tried to avert the dreaded visitation.

But it was no good: sometimes, as a result, instead of one baby they got twins, and so became poorer than ever, and at a faster rate. In thus trying to avoid a large family, Semolina was different from her parents, who took every-

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thing just as it came and never troubled to look ahead, or make plans any farther than for the day itself. "Trouble is sure to come," said her mother; "why look for it?" And so, the larger the family grew the nearer it came to starvation.

The carelessness of her parents had been Semolina's greatest misfortune from her birth, though it had also brought her one bit of luck. For Semolina had a fairy godmother. This had come about under the following circumstances. Shortly after Semolina's birth, her mother, meaning to warm up some milk just before going to bed, had gone to put it on the fire; and fetching it from the larder, she had put on the wrong saucepan—an empty one, in which (finding that it was empty) a certain fairy sanitary inspector had taken up her quarters for the night.

When the fairy, awakened by the heat, began screaming and knocking at the closed lid, Semolina's mother took off the pot, raised the cover, and let out the fairy.

In gratitude for this service, though also rather in a temper, the fairy had waved her wand over the sleeping infant. "Your child, woman," said she, "shall be more careful than

you have been—that, at least, I *will* see to! Yes, much more careful!” And having thus bestowed her dubious gift, she vanished, and had never been seen again.

But carefulness had ever since remained Semolina’s besetting characteristic; not that her mother valued it in the least, or made any conscious use of it; nor did it bring Semolina happiness. Still, there it was; and now and again Semolina’s care had averted household catastrophes. But it had not prevented the family from growing larger.

Everybody knew that Semolina had started life with the advantage of a fairy godmother; but her parents had changed house so often, without letting landlords or tradespeople know, that it was scarcely to be wondered at if they had lost connection; nor did it seem likely that it would ever be re-established.

Nevertheless in the twelfth year of her age, and in view of yet another expected baby, Semolina thought that she would try what wishing and praying might do. So she began wishing from day to day for the fairy to return and provide her with some means for putting an end to the family increase.

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Every night, when Semolina went to bed, she breathed a wish into both her stockings, and hung them on the broomstick—for that, she had been told, was the best way of summoning a fairy to her aid—and leaving the broomstick against the foot of the family bed, she would go to sleep, hoping that somehow before morning a way to the fulfilment of her wish would be revealed.

With her mind thus occupied, she slept lightly, and one night was awakened by the broomstick tapping softly against the bed-rail. Semolina sat up in bed all expectation; and up got the leaning broomstick and began hopping towards the door. Semolina got up, too, and climbed across a sleeping row of her brothers and sisters to follow the broomstick's leading. Hop, hop, hop, down the stairs ever so lightly went the broomstick, and Semolina went after.

Outside was beautiful moonlight that each moment seemed to grow brighter; and away over by-road and field-path went the broomstick, with Semolina's two stockings dangling from its shoulders, and Semolina following after.

Presently they came to a rough clearing on

the skirts of a wood, and a little later inside the wood they came to a high wall; and inside the wall stood a queer little house with a thatched roof; and in the wall was a door.

The broomstick knocked at the door three times; then it threw off the stockings, and lying down with its head against the scraper seemed to go fast asleep. Semolina, afraid of forgetting or losing the stockings, had just picked them up and was holding them, one in each hand, when the door opened, and there stood a little old lady, with beady bright eyes and a brown skin; and her dress was all ribbed and shiny and hard like blue glass or beetles' wings; and over the front of it she wore a large orange apron, on which was written in large black letters, "Poison, *not* to be taken."

Semolina was all taken aback at the sight of her; but though she had never imagined that a fairy could look like this (not realising that a fairy sanitary inspector was bound to be something of a Caution as regards appearances), nevertheless she felt now that a living specimen was before her.

"Well, Goddaughter, so you've come at last,"

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said the bottle-like fairy, "and what can I do for you?"

This gave Semolina a still greater surprise; not only was the old lady a fairy, but she was the right one—the one of all others whom Semolina wished to see. So, holding the two empty stockings in her hands, she stated her errand, and then stood waiting for instruction.

"Too large a family, eh?" said the old lady. "Want to be rid of it? Easy enough! You've only go to run away."

"Oh, but I can't!" said Semolina. "You see, I'm one of them; and I have my father and mother to look after as well as all the others. And however much I ran away, the family would still be there, getting larger and larger, and poorer and poorer. It's *that* I mind about."

"Getting poorer?" queried the fairy. "Well, a large family *is* a large family; and if you must stick to it there's no getting away from it. You've either got to kill it, or you've got to cure it."

"But how can I cure it, when it's there already?" inquired Semolina.

"You can," said the fairy. "But come first and see whether killing doesn't attract you.

Then, if you think curing is any better, I'll give you a cure."

The fairy led the way through the house into a small garden, thickly planted with the most extraordinary looking growths that Semolina had ever set eyes on. They were none of them exactly beautiful; but they grew with quite amazing vigour and profusion, seeming to enjoy life in their own way tremendously.

"There's a picture for you!" said the fairy. "Aren't they just killing?" Evidently she was very proud of them.

"But what in the world are they?" inquired Semolina.

"They are the diseases," replied the fairy. "Some came from the garden of Æsculapius, my great-great-grandfather, but they have been considerably added to since his day. "There," she went on, "you have all the illnesses that people can die of. Making cures for them, you see. I have to grow the things themselves. And they are very interesting, I assure you; some of them I make real pets of. Those double pneumonias"—she pointed to a bed as she spoke—"have been quite beautiful; but the weather is getting too hot for them. They

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have their season like everything else, and their likes and dislikes: some like heat, some like cold, some enjoy the wet, some the dry; some are perennials, some are only annuals, growing splendidly for a short time, and then almost dying out. Now, I dare-say, you hadn't an idea what diseases looked like in their actual growth before people took to them?"

"That I never did!" said Semolina.

"Well, come and have a look at them. Only be sure you keep to the paths, and quite close to me: some of them are rather catching."

Semolina attached herself as close as she could to the bluebottle fairy; and together they went down the path, with all the diseases growing in beds (sick-beds, that is to say) to right and left of them.

"Those," said the fairy, stopping to point, are lumbagos and sciatica; they are not much to look at just now, but there'll be more of them later. Bronchials also do better in the winter; but that is a fine anthrax growing over there, and up there on that wall is a splendid angina pectoris."

"Now if it's children you want to get rid of," the fairy went on, "here's a nice healthy row of

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scarlatinas just out. Children take to them easily, or there's a diphtheria, if you prefer it."

"And what's that?" inquired Semolina, pointing to a large black-and-tan flower, of somewhat similar shape to the dog-tooth violet.

"That is a hydrophobia," said the fairy. "Take care; it has a poisonous bark that bites if you touch it. It's a lively thing of its kind, but it takes about two years to establish; so on the whole, for a fast-growing family, I wouldn't advise that."

"Oh, I don't want it," replied Semolina. "I was only just looking at it. And what's that?" She pointed to a grey moss-like growth which was straying out across the path.

"That's creeping paralysis," said the fairy; "good for old people, or for any one you want to keep out of mischief; but it doesn't often come in the way of children."

"Oh, it isn't the *children* who are mischievous—not at our home," said Semolina; "it's—" And then she stopped speaking, but went on thinking. Meanwhile the old fairy continued the conversation, pointing to right and left as she went. "That is elephantiasis; it grows all over the place, and there's no stop-

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ping it; but you can live with it for ever. Neuralgias are much the same, so far as living with them is concerned; but they are a jumpy sort of growth, and you never know where you mayn't have them next. Those carbuncles are big fine things, but they're only troublesome and don't kill people; and polypuses are much the same. Dropsies and palsies are good for bedding-out purposes; but you don't get on fast with them. I've got a large variety of hysterias—that nostalgia is one of them. Home-sweet-home is another name for it, but that would hardly suit you—or would it? If you want to make any one home-sick, there you are!”

“I'll see,” said Semolina: she was still thinking. “And now, please, as you've shown me the kills, may I see some of the cures?”

“You must come into the house to see them,” said her godmother; “they are in bottles. But really I'm not sure that I've got anything warranted to cure a whole family; I've never been asked for such a thing before. Let me see!”

She led the way into the house; and there on a shelf Semolina saw rows and rows of bottles of various colours and sizes, each one bearing a different name. The fairy ran her finger along

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the descriptions upon the labels: presently she paused.

"Here is one, now, called 'Glob': it comes from America, and is said to cure everything. If that is true (I haven't tried it myself, except for toothache; and it cured that, it drew the tooth right out), well, if it's true, it ought to be able to cure a large family. Would you like to try it?"

Semolina thought she would.

"And in case it fails, you might take one of the other things—one of the kills, I mean—to fall back on."

Semolina was a little doubtful about that, but finally decided to take a nostalgia—mainly because its other name, "home-sweet-home," rather pleased her.

So the fairy filled her two stockings for her—one with kill and the other with cure. Into the one she put a root of nostalgia, and into the other a large bottle of "Glob." "Only take care not to break the bottle," she remarked, "or you'll be done for; and remember that if you apply the nostalgia upside-down it'll have quite an opposite effect. There are two sorts of home-sickness, you know—one makes people

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want to be at home, and the other makes them want to leave it."

Semolina nodded, looking at the fairy with wise eyes. Then having thanked her, and carrying a full stocking in each hand, she went to rejoin the broomstick, and off they started for home again.

Before they had gone far, Semolina was quite overcome with curiosity; she was dying to test the virtue of her two acquisitions. And thought she to herself, "As I have got the cure by me, it can do no harm if I just try a little bit of the kill."

So sitting down by the wayside she turned out the contents of her two stockings—the root of nostalgia, and the bottle of "Glob" warranted to cure everything. Then she took the nostalgia root, and holding it right way up, gave herself a little rub with it.

Hardly had she done so when she felt a terrible pain in her heart, and began to cry. "Oh, I do so want to go home! I do so want to go home!" she kept saying. "Oh, I'm so miserable; if I don't get home I shall die!"

The suddenness and the severity of the symptom quite frightened her; so in great haste she

took up the bottle of "Glob" and drew out the stopper.

Scarcely had she done so than there exuded from it a large Genie, with oily locks, shiny skin, and a very pungent odour. His complexion was a bright copper, and his mouth, when he opened it, contained a strong American accent.

Semolina fell flat with astonishment; but the Genie, in the most helpful way possible, immediately picked her up and began dusting her down. Semolina was quite ashamed of herself for having been so startled; he was evidently a very kind person.

"You are very good," she said compunctiously when he had done.

"Good?" commented the Genie. "Well, I reckon you are about right there! I'm as good as gold, and I go a darned sight farther. There isn't any corner of the world I can't get round. The sovereign remedy, 'Glob,' cures everything."

He began rubbing himself all over her as he spoke, covering her with grease and smell.

"Whatever *are* you doing?" cried Semolina,

a little hurt in her dignity by this summary proceeding.

"Well, I suppose you've got something the matter with you," said the Genie; "else why did you take my top off?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Semolina, "I'm unhappy; I'm the most miserable person in the world." (She stopped to think.) "As least, I was a moment ago." And then she began laughing. "Glob" had cured her.

The Genie looked quite pleased with himself. "There, see now!" he said. "The man who invented me had all the illnesses under the sun; but I cured him, I did—I cured him to such an extent that somebody mistook him for a red herring and ate him. And the man who did that has never been ill since."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Semolina.

But the Genie did not stop to explain further. "Here!" he cried. "What am I hanging around for? If I've done my work, I'm going back into my bottle." And he proceeded to get into it as he spoke. When he was all in except his head, he paused for a moment. "You won't see me again," he said, "not as I really am. I have to conceal myself, else people would be

frightened and run away, and I should cure nobody. But I shall be there all right; and when you want more of me, you've only got to pour me into a fresh bottle. I can fill thousands of bottles: nothing ever exhausts *me!*”

Having so spoken, “Glob” went back into his bottle; and Semolina put on the stopper, and carried him home with her.

When she got there it was only just beginning to be light, and her father and mother were still in bed and asleep. So were all the children; but Semolina did not allow that to continue. One by one she got them all out of bed, opened her bottle, took out “Glob,” and treating each one in turn rubbed him all over them from head to foot.

“Glob” had now taken on a new form, as he had warned her; he was no longer a Genie, but simply a thick brown liquid of an oily consistency, which you poured into the palm of your hand and then rubbed with. But his smell was exactly the same as ever; he smelt horrid, but healthy.

Semolina picked out one of her small brothers, and began rubbing him with “Glob.” She rubbed him all over from head to foot, and

the small brother took it meekly, saying no word; for his eldest sister had long been a terror to him, and one whose word was law.

Then she took one of her little sisters, and began rubbing her. "What's that for?" inquired the little sister; for girls are more inquisitive about things than boys, being more intelligent.

"It's to cure you," said Semolina.

"What of?"

"Cure you of being here at all."

"Why shouldn't I be here?" inquired the little sister in injured tones.

"Lor! don't ask such silly questions!" retorted Semolina. "What use are you, now that you are here?"

Having finished the rubbing, she took out number three; and so she did with the whole twelve of them.

And when she had done she stood them in a row and looked at them; and they all shone like copper saucepans.

"Ah, you'll do nicely now," said Semolina. "There, run and play!"

"Can't we have any breakfast?" inquired the children.

"There isn't any breakfast for you," said Semolina. "Haven't I cured you asking for breakfast when there isn't any? You'd better all come and let me give you another rub."

But at that threat all the children ran off into the road and began playing; and there they ran up and down, shining like copper saucepans; you never saw such a sight in all your life, except perhaps in a millionaire's family, or among the Red Indians.

That day everybody who went by stopped to look at them. "What extraordinarily healthy-looking children!" was the constant remark; "and how happy they seem! Your father and mother must be very good to you."

Some people admired their happy and healthy looks so much that they gave them coppers—a thing they would never have done had they looked otherwise; so the children got their breakfast after all, buying it a penn'orth at a time, till by evening they were well fed and satisfied.

Semolina was satisfied also; she felt that she had done a good day's work. But her mother only said, "What have you been shining 'em like that for? Ridiculous, I call it: trying to

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make 'em look like the quality. But there was never any understanding *you*."

That night, when Semolina put them to bed, she gave her copper-saucepan family another rub over. Then she went out to beg of her neighbours as many empty bottles as they could spare. She got fifteen, three with cracks in them, but only seven with corks. These she brought home, and washed carefully, corks as well. Then she poured "Glob" into them, and cutting the corks in two, corked fourteen of them. Then she put the fourteen bottles to stand in the window. Then she wrote out, and stuck up over them, a large label, "IT'S GLOB AS DOES IT," and the fifteenth uncorked bottle she put to stand by itself, labelled "Sample trials, free gratis for nothing." Then she went to bed happy.

The next morning she started business. She gave the children another polish, and the remains of yesterday's breakfast, and turned them out to play in the road, all shining like copper saucepans. And everybody who went by stopped to look at them, and then at the fourteen bottles in the window, and the label bearing the words "IT'S GLOB AS DOES IT," and then

at the sample bottle with its attractive offer of a free trial.

By the end of the day Semolina had almost emptied the sample bottle, and had sold the other fourteen for a penny each.

That evening her mother gave birth to triplets.

Semolina gave the triplets and her mother a good rubbing with "Glob," settled them and the family comfortably down for the night, and then went off to beg more empty bottles from the neighbours. But the neighbours, who had heard all about what she was doing, now made her pay for them. She had to pay a penny each for twelve bottles; and so had only twopence left for the family to carry on with.

This set her thinking; and having thought, the next day she priced the bottles at twopence each instead of a penny, and though the sample bottle was now empty she did a roaring trade—sold all twelve, that is to say. Before a week was out she was selling at sixpence; and the price of empty bottles supplied to her by neighbours had gone up to twopence.

This rise in the price of bottles puzzled her; but after again thinking she had a great idea.

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She put up a notice: "Everybody's to bring their own bottles." And the public responded to her demand, as though she had been a lord.

They brought very large bottles, it is true; but that did not matter to Semolina. "Glob's" supply never failed her; Semolina got her sixpence, and was satisfied.

This went on till people who had come with small bottles complained of having to pay as much as people with large bottles; they wanted to have theirs filled at half-price. This, however, Semolina flatly refused to do; but after thinking once more, she charged double price to the people who brought large bottles; and having got her mind square upon that point, became quite professional in her ways, while trade continued to roar round her.

Semolina's cares would now have been over, but for one thing only. Her father and mother were not of a saving disposition; and all the money that Semolina earned by selling "Glob" they were immediately for spending. For a time Semolina did not like to deny them; but after a while her mother's careless extravagance, and her father's increasing habits, caused her to revolt. She began to conceal what she

earned; and every night, after they had gone to bed, she went out and buried quite half of it in a beautiful hole in the ground; and as time went on the hole got fuller and fuller, and Semolina (careful soul) more secretive about the steady increase of her takings.

Presently Semolina's father became discontented when trade had apparently ceased to roar. He could not think why it was that Semolina, who had started so well, was now doing such small business—only just enough, in fact, to keep the house going. "It isn't right," he said; and he said it more especially when his daughter had no money for him to take to the public-house of an evening. "Semolina, it isn't right, and it isn't respectful. You don't treat me as a father had ought be treated."

"Why, I'm always treating you!" exclaimed Semolina, highly indignant at this proof of parental ingratitude.

"Oh, you are, are you, you bottle-nosed imp!" (This because at that moment Semolina, with head close down, was carefully decanting some more of her precious "Glob" into empty bottles.) "There, get along with you! I'm sick of it all!" And so saying, he gave her

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a rough push, and the bottle flew out of her hands on to the floor, and was smashed to atoms.

"There! now you've done it!" cried Semolina heartily: but for the moment she said no more. For up from the glass wreckage rose the Genie, full of fury, and terrible of aspect, and the smell of him was enough to knock you down.

"That cures me of staying here any more!" cried the Genie, shaking his fist at the terrified father, and dealing him a parting kick in the paunch, he went up through the ceiling and disappeared.

Semolina's father fainted right off.

There at her feet he lay helpless, with rolled up eyes.

"Well, I suppose I've got to recover him, somehow," said his daughter to herself. Then she bethought her, and, running to the place where she had hidden it, fetched out the nostalgia root. Turning it upside down she began vigorously to rub the face and hands of her unconscious parent.

In a shot his senses returned to him, and he sat up. "I'm sick of this!" he said. "Sick of everything, sick of the very sight of you!" He

stumbled to his feet; then catching sight of the broken bottle, he remembered, and looked apprehensively about him.

But though the Genie was gone, the terror of him remained; and the man lurched hastily to the door.

"That cures me of staying here any more!" he remarked. "Home-sweet-home? —I don't think." And so saying, out he went and disappeared down the road.

"Well, I suppose it's a good riddance," said Semolina; and then she sat down and began to cry.

Presently her mother came in.

"What are you crying for?" she asked.

"Father's finished off the 'Glob' bottle; there isn't any more of it left."

"What! Drunk it?"

"I wish he had!" said Semolina, struck by an afterthought. "That 'ud have cured him."

"What of?"

"Everything."

"Where is your father now?"

"Singing 'Home-sweet-home' down at the public-house, I shouldn't wonder," replied Semolina. "But he's all right: he won't come

Kill or Cure

home any more. I gave him such a rubbing into, he'll never get cured of that!"

"What are you talking about?" inquired her mother. But Semolina was following her own thoughts, and paid no attention.

"Anyway, we've enough to go on with," she remarked, "if we are only careful. And now father's gone, don't you go having any more babies—we've got enough of 'em."

"Why, what do you take me for!" exclaimed the mother indignantly.

"You are so careless, mother!" said Semolina apologetically; and then her mother laughed.

"You are a perfect cure, you are!" she said then.

"I believe I am," said Semolina.

A few days later her fairy godmother popped her head in at the door. "Well, how are you getting on?" she inquired.

"Nicely, thank you," said Semolina. "Father got home-sick and went away. We are all right now."

"But you've still got your mother with you!" remarked the fairy.

"Oh, I can manage mother!" said Semolina.

XVI: Blind Love

HOW shall I tell this gentle story so that they who read may not weep too much for the sorrows that are told therein; for, indeed, none must grieve too greatly, seeing that all comes to a good ending.

This is how a king's love for his wife, and the faithful worship he kept for her, brought great pain to them both, by the working of one fairy's malice, which I shall now tell you of. This king, whose name was Agwisaunce, had to wife a queen whose beauty was to him as a veil hiding from him the fairness of other women. No eyes drew him but hers, nor did the sweetness of other lips seem to him a taste worth having. If I began, I could not finish telling all the tenderness their hearts had for each other. But though their love ripened from year to year, no fruit of it came to them.

After they had been married many years, without children, there chanced one day, into the court of that realm, a fairy possessing great sleight of magic, and such beauty as was not

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safe to look upon, so piercing were its effects. And she, being received at the Court with much honour, was stricken presently with an uncontrollable passion for the King's person. Such grief falls but seldom to the finer nature of which fairies are moulded; yet, when it comes, it strikes down mortally into the roots of their being; nor can they rest till fate has made accord with their desire.

So it was with this fairy whom love for King Agwisaunce lowered to the very dust of humbleness. Though she traced and traversed to get the better of his heart, never once could she win him to turn on her the amorousness of his eyes, or to pretend knowledge of that to which she aimed. Till at last there came a day when in plain words the fairy made known to him her wound, and Agwisaunce for his part, gave her a downright refusal for answer. "I think shame," said he, "that a great fairy such as thou, should seek to come between the love that two mortals bear in constancy and pure trust to each other!" So at that the fairy parted from him without more words; and he, believing her gone, put thought of it away in secrecy and with a light mind.

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But that same night Agwisaunce, in the barred solitude of his chamber, and nigh upon slumber, felt lips that he deemed to be those of his own wife coming and going over his face, and he turned to do honour to her visit in fair amity. Yet he thought within himself, "Why does she not kiss me as we always do, in the hollow under my right ear?" For that was the way these lovers had—a token of things since they were first wed.

Then he lifted his hands to the face that was by his, saying, "Verily, is it you, beloved?" And at that came more kisses, but no answer. Then the King thought, "Now, if I kiss her not in the hollow under her right ear, and she ask it not of me, I shall know that there is some estrangement come betwixt her and me." So then he kissed her between the brows and in no other way; and the other made no complaint at that, only kissing him the more.

Then Agwisaunce rose up wondering, and made a light to know what case he was in; yet when he searched, all the couch was empty—none could he see. Then he passed to his Queen's own chamber, and found her sleeping fast. "Truly I have been deceived," thought

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he, and returned to lie down. But so soon as he was stretched out at full length, again, he felt by his side one that kissed and caressed him without ceasing.

So at that, Agwisaunce, making an end of it, pushed his bedfellow from him saying, "This is not my own Queen, but some other!" Then softly the fairy's voice spake to him; but he, still not recognising her, cried, "Go to, thou nameless wanton! Art thou not ashamed to seek after me thus?" But she: "Where I have love I have secrecy, but no shame. Lie down and do my will; thy wife shall not know. For none saw me entering, neither will any see me return. Even as I was to thee when thou camest in with the light, so have I made myself invisible to mortal gaze; and where no other can be wise, it is well for thee to be."

Then Agwisaunce was up in great wrath; and said he, keeping her out from him at arm's length, "Is not the rest enough, but thou must take thine invisibility as a cloak to thy foulness, and come in by stealth to play the wanton between me and my Queen!"

At which the fairy, seeing that she was not to prevail, cried back on him with fury, "Ah,

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virtuous one, now even as thou hast reviled me with shameful words, so will I pay it back to thee again. It is news to thee that even now thy Queen is with child; and of that there shall come a daughter to be a thorn in the side of her parents; for from the hour of her birth she shall be invisible, and so shall she remain till she also play the wanton. And when she shall have played the wanton, then shall that spell be taken off her, and thou shalt see the face of her shame and the shame of thy house, and be sorry at last for the scorn of thy words this night!"

Then the fairy departed, and King Agwisaunce lay down with great trembling and watched until it was morning.

On the morrow the Queen, beholding his mournful countenance, and his gaze ever at her girdle, wherein he beheld sorrow now grow, besought him by all his love to tell her wherein life ailed for him. Then little by little she drew out from him a part of that story; but on one part his lips stayed dumb, only, said he, "There remains one condition by which the spell shall be loosed and our daughter given to our eyes; but as to that, pray that thou never have reason to behold her face! Rather ask

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Heaven to keep her as she is born." And when the Queen asked him what it might be, he answered, "If I told you so much, straightway your pains would seize you and the child die, born too soon for life to be in it. Never ask me to tell you that!"

So, not many months after, the Queen's time came for her to be delivered; and she wept bitterly over the thought of the child that was to be born like a ghost out of her womb, never to bless her eyes with its beauty, for a solace to all her sorrow. Presently there was heard in the palace the cry of a new-born babe; and those that were in the chamber, hearing the cry, but beholding nothing, knew that the curse had fallen; for all knew that a curse had been foretold on the birth. But none save the King and Queen knew the cause of it, and only the King by what way to be rid of it.

The King reached out his hands and took up into them the invisible life that struggled and wailed sadly at being born; then the mother, clasping her child to her breast, felt it over from head to foot, and, even as she wept for the useless longing of her eyes, declared that no child so perfectly formed, from the dimple of

its head to the cushioned soles of its feet, had ever before been born into the world.

After that came the christening: never was so strange a one since time began, for the priest could not see the babe he held, and had she fallen from his arms she might have been drowned past finding. The whole Court drew a breath of relief when she was given back into her mother's arms, bearing the name of Innygreth.

With what trouble, and losings and findings again, her babyhood was passed, it would be wearisome to tell. But before long the Princess took her life into her own hands and shaped out her own fate. For from the moment that she could walk she became the most surprising and perplexing of charges. Here one moment, she was gone the next, and unless it were her royal will to let sound go forth of her whereabouts, she was more lost to mortal reach than a needle in a load of hay.

But gradually, as babyhood wore off, she became gracious and kind in her ways, yet sad that she had no other children to play with. At times they would hear her stop in her walk before one of the great mirrors of the palace, and

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there stand whispering softly to herself. But whether what her eyes saw were her own image or emptiness she would never tell.

All that her touch rested on and warmed became invisible as herself. Her clothes and all the jewels and feathers that were put upon her, warmed by her body, passed out of sight.

Slowly her mind grew in gentleness and grace of her own choosing. That her presence might be known, she took to bearing always in her hand a lighted taper. And all the taper, when her fingers closed on it, became invisible as her dress; but the flame, since she did not touch that, burned clear. So wherever a light went travelling about in mid-air the courtiers knew that Princess Innygreth was in its company.

On her tenth birthday the Princess came to the Queen and said, "Beautiful mother, would it not gladden thy heart to see only a little part of me, of whom for ten years thou hast seen nothing?" "Oh, my Beautiful, fate holds thee, and I cannot!" replied her mother.

Then Innygreth, reaching out her hand, loosed from it something that shone as it fell into the Queen's lap; for as soon as she loosed

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it out of her hand it became visible. And the Queen saw there a great pile of golden hair that shone like fire, which the Princess had cut off that her mother might learn how beautiful she was.

The Queen laughed and cried with joy, as, for the first time her eyes were blessed with the sight of a small part of her daughter's loveliness. And even more did Innygreth herself cry and weep. "I have given you all of it," she sobbed "because I love you so!"

As the Princess grew older she became very wise. "Where did you learn all these things?" asked the King. "You do not read many books."

"I blow out my light," said the Princess, "and I learn things as they are, and not as princesses are used to be taught them. I know many things that you do not. Some day when I know more I will teach you how to govern well." The King laughed at that; but the Princess was grave. "To me," she said, "all the world is like a glass; I see it, but it does not see me."

Now, as soon as the Princess drew near to the age for marriage, the King began thinking

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that to have her roaming free, fluttering the downy wings of her unguarded virginity, was a tempting of God's providence. Therefore he began scouring the world to find a fit suitor for her hand.

Many came, indeed, to the Court, drawn by the story of her marvellous manner of life, her great wisdom, and possible beauty; but though all were won by the charm of her voice, they dreaded that peace with honour could not come in the possession of a wife over whose doings only the eye of Heaven could keep watch. Some indeed thought that the spell under which the Princess lay was friendly to her fortunes and a trap to the unwary, and that her invisibility concealed a hideousness which marriage alone would reveal.

One and all the suitors retired with polite elongations of regrets, and the King fell to breakfasting on despair; and a trepidation lest his daughter should one day swim scandalously into view before the eyes of the whole Court caught him in the small of his back whenever he opened a door or turned a corner.

Now, there was then serving about the palace a youth named Sir Percyn, he being a lieutenant

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in the King's guard, and a fellow of most merry wit. All things he did came so gladly off his conscience they had the apparent seeming of virtue. As for his virtues, he cloaked them in such waywardness that men, having to laugh, forgot afterwards to admire. Were he to do any bravery, he covered it by a wager; or a gentleness, he did it by jest. But the Princess, passing unseen and unknown out and in among the precincts of the court, saw Sir Percyn when he wist little who looked at him, nor was making capers to conceal his cherubimity.

It was not long before Innygreth favoured him wondrously, and with maidenly reserve blowing out the light of her presence, lingered daily in his company, warming her regard for the one man who was the same, whether before kings or behind them.

Now, Innygreth, being so sheltered by her birthright, at once from the assaults and the safeguards men make on womanly innocence, whether to foul or to foster it, had great knowledge of many things that are shuttered from the eyes of most maidens. Therefore she was honest without confusion, and had modesty without fear; and having had no shame for her

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own body since the day of her birth, had no shame of it in others. Also rank she saw below and over; truly between the crowns that bowed and the crowns that were bowed to, it seemed a little space to her.

Thus she passed down through all her father's court, from the men of state till she came to the lower grades where Sir Percyn made gay—a light of March-moon madness round his head; and there she stayed and searched no farther, having found the unit of her thoughts.

As one learns to love the south wind when it blows full of the breath of flowers, though one sees it not, so Sir Percyn grew in love with the toils of her sweet voice. So much he loved her that in a while she lost with him her power of stolen marches, and came she never so silently and with no light, still he knew her to be there, and the colour would run to his face to meet her as she came. All may guess how after that she knew that her heart held its wish.

For three days she let him go sad, but after that she could no longer withstand the springing tenderness of her love. That time she put her hands about his face, and let word of it go.

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"Thou loon, thou loon!" said she, "why ever dost thou not speak?" And quoth Sir Percyn, trembling between great joy and sorrow: "Speak what, thou eclipser of mine eyes?" Innygreth answered: "Truth, only, thou moon of madness! Nay, nay, to be ashamed for loving me so well!" And before he knew what more not to do, her invisible heart lay knocking at his side, as wanting to get in.

Then he, thinking of all her height above him in the world, and the gulf that sovereignty and power made betwixt her and him, held her the more closely for that, and out of hopelessness grew bold; and he cried out in anger and exultation, "Nay, now that I have thee, I will never let thee go!"

She laughed for pure pride.

"Between us," she said, "is a great gulf fixed that no bridge can cross."

"Our love fills it," he answered, "it carries us."

"To what shore?" she asked him.

"To thine or mine—it is all one," he answered.

"Thou knowest me," said Innygreth; "wouldst thou see my face?" She took his

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hand and laid it over her unviewed features. Her knight thrilled to feel the loveliness that lay there. "Tell it me," she murmured, "for till now I have heard no man praise my beauty."

Sir Percyn, moving his hand as a blind man that reads, said: "Thine eyes drink the light as the deer drink up the brooks. Thy lips are a rose-garden where the rocks make echoes; thy cheeks are a land of blossoming orchards; and thy brows are the gates of heaven. Though I have not seen thy face, now I know it, for my love has filled the gulf and carried me through to the invisible wherein thou dwellest."

Now, none need tell what lovers say when they have once said all, nor how often, if they have means, they meet. Between Innygreth and Sir Percyn there began to be long meetings and partings, and the Princess, being free from the bonds that hold others, was like moonlight and sunlight about her lover's ways.

Often at the dead of night she would come into the chamber where he lay, and sit watching him asleep, or, waking him, would hold his hands, and, till pure darkness fell before dawn, give him the music of her sweet voice. And Sir Percyn, beholding in his lady a modesty

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without fear, and a trust that dreaded no shame, became afraid with the great bliss of the love that Heaven allowed, and trembled daily while she drew him to the heights of her own nature, that, having so much love, had no room for guile.

When he was on guard by night at the palace, he would wait below the roses that climbed to Innygreth's chamber, and if she waived her light to him, then he was up by flying buttress and carved moulding, and there, hanging across the window-sill, among the thickest of them, embracing Innygreth in his arms. Low and soft were the words they spoke; but a sharp-eared crone that was put by the King to be about the Princess caught some sound of them.

She came and whispered to the King how at night there was a sound of a man's voice in his daughter's chamber, and chirpings like birds in the leaves about the window—so many that she trembled and lost count of them.

Agwisaunce, when he heard that, took so large a panic that he stooped down his pride and on following nights hid himself in the arras of Innygreth's chamber to learn how near might be the undoing of the honour of his

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house. And, surely, on the third night he heard the Princess move out of bed, and through the window the sound of one climbing the wall without, and presently kisses so many and passionate that, fearing what next might have place, he leapt forth, crying out on his daughter for a wanton. At which word one blow caught him and laid him down for a while prone and speechless; for Sir Percyn, hearing the honour of his fair love slandered, and knowing not that it was the King, fetched Agwisaunce so full a buffet that the thing became high treason. And betwixt this and that, Sir Percyn's head was forfeited by the time the King had recovered consciousness.

So the next day the Court heard how Sir Percyn was under arrest to be tried for an attempt on the King's life and honour. Nor through all incredulity and bewilderment did any get nearer to the truth than that.

But now more and more the King was seized by a horrible fear lest some fine morning he should find his daughter made visible before his eyes, and her bloom and reputation flown from her like the raven out of the ark. "Already she goes the way of a wanton," he said, "and

that is a short road with a quick ending. Though walls have ears, for her they have not eyes. How shall I keep her, then, so that I be not presently shamed in my own palace?"

Now, even while he trembled over his daughter, so contagiously disposed towards her fate, there fell to him, like a star out of the lap of Fortune, a suitor for the hand of Princess Innygreth. The Prince of a neighbouring country, amorous with curiosity for the wooing of invisible loveliness, sent word asking for the hand of the Princess in marriage.

The King showered the news with tears of gratitude, and returned urgent greetings, beseeching the Prince to come in the place of his messengers. Before a week had passed the palace was full of him. He came in high feather, and with a great retinue, eager to behold the unbeholdable, that was to be his bride.

As for Innygreth, she kept her peace and went her ways at leisure, carrying ropes and files and ladders and swords and chain-armour to her lover in prison, that by craft or courage he might make his way out and escape; and all this she did by the spell of invisibility which rested on her. "But first," said Sir Percyn, "I

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will stand my trial, and declare my innocence before my judges. And that, indeed, was the wreck of his chances; for when, after long waiting, he was tried secretly and condemned to death, he was placed at once in a narrow cell, where the windows were so narrow that no filing could make room for a man's body to pass through, and the walls were too thick and the warders too many for there to be any other means of escape. But all this was afterwards.

Therefore, at the time of the Prince-suitor's coming, Innygreth's mind was at ease, and she had full confidence that her power should work her lover's release; and as for marriage, she knew that in the end she was her own mistress.

So when the Prince stood before her, and fawned and bowed, she curtsied to him with her candle and told him she liked him well. And the wooing prospered, being pushed on by the King, till a whisper got to the suitor that the Princess was not so discreet of blood as to make a safe wife if none could watch over her. At that his suit faltered, and he talked of affairs of state requiring a postponement of the nuptials.

Then the King in despair told him what he

had never told to man before, and by what hard condition alone his daughter could ever escape from her invisibility. The Prince-suitor, who had a fine presence and a light heart, laughed, and said, "It seems to me that if the Princess will but consent to like me well enough one day before our marriage, I may lead a fair bride to the altar in the eyes of all men."

When King Agwisaunce took in the discreet ingenuity of that proposal, he became perfectly shocked with joy; and thought he, hugging his conscience into a corner, "Am I a father or a monster to devise this thing for my own daughter?" Nevertheless, despair of other salvation so pricked him that he hurried on the preparations for the nuptials. For all the while terror blew on him in little hot gusts lest his daughter should forestall him and ruin all; since, were she now to appear visible to the world, the Prince-suitor would fully understand the cause, and have plain grounds for breaking the matter off.

The old crone that watched over Innygreth said to her father: "Often the Princess is not in her chamber, and I know not whither she goes." But the King, when he heard that,

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knew and trembled. Therefore, to make all sure, he caused every door to be locked on her, meaning to keep her within, a close prisoner, till the morning of her marriage.

And now Sir Percyn, being tried and condemned, the hour for his beheading had been fixed; and by the King's will, it was to be at midnight on the night before Innygreth's marriage. As the day approached, whenever the King and the Prince-suitor met, the latter smiled, as it is said augurs do; but the King cast down his eyes.

And now, indeed, despair was eating up the heart of Innygreth, for she herself was behind locks, that try as she would she might not slip by, and she heard from the talk of her women how the night before her marriage was to be the night also of Sir Percyn's doom.

Now, the grief that the Princess had no man could see, though her face was bowed down under the foreshadow of her lover's death. Her light she put away, for often the shuddering in her hands might not hold it; but her lips gave out no sound of her sorrow. Only her mother, coming to Innygreth's chamber, heard the soft falling of tears upon the floor. "Ah, my

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child!" cried the Queen, and for pity brought the King in, and showed him where a pool had formed itself from that pure sorrow; and she said bitterly, "Thou canst not behold our daughter's face, yet thou canst behold her tears: see the river of that grief which is in her! Yea, I have heard her heart breaking which I cannot see! Presently, I think, she will fall dead into our presence, and I shall behold her beauty too late but to weep over it. Is that indeed the end promised for her by the fairy?" But the King said, "That is not the end." Though even now he would not tell her how the end was to be. "This is but a passing shower," said he: "to-morrow she shall shine!"

Every day brought in piles of presents for the bride, and every night the palace was a blaze of lights; but the King was sore at heart over the heavy condition that lay between him and the achievement of his daughter's happiness, and his thoughts grew full of tenderness. He came and felt for her head bowed all low with grief. "Wilt thou not trust the word of a loving father," said he, fondling it, "that to have thee happy and sound before his eyes is all that he desires? But thy fate makes the way

hard. Only believe that whoever comes to thee betwixt now and to-morrow, bearing my signet-ring, comes for thy good; and to-morrow, if thou wilt obey me well, thou shalt be a fair wife in the eyes of all."

Then, when the hour drew on into night, he took her hand and led her softly to her bed-chamber; and said he: "See, I will myself keep the key of thy chamber; and whatsoever happens to thee this night is of my love. And this I swear to thee by my royal word that to-morrow, when I see thy face plain, then thou hast only to ask thy will and it shall be my wedding gift to thee, were it the half of my kingdom."

He said to her waiting-woman: "When the Princess has put off her attire, bring it all forth from the chamber, that she may not rise up again this night." For he feared yet that she might rise by stealth in the night and give the slip to her fortune.

Therefore when presently the Princess had unrobed herself and put out the light of her presence, the waiting-woman brought forth all the attire she had worn that day, and left Innygreth in only her bedlinen, nor was any other garment left her to put on.

So presently, when all the palace slept, the King gave his signet-ring to the Prince-suitor, and also the keys of every door, and bidding him Godspeed, made haste and departed.

The Princess, left alone, rose up from her bed, and found her garments missing. Yet had that hindrance been to her as to other maidens it had not kept her from her lover's side, whose last hour on earth now drew near. Therefore, the door being fast, she opened her window and leaned forth, where so often before she had leaned with the touch of Sir Percyn's face upon hers.

The warm summer night shed its breath upon her lips full of the scent of roses. So, remembering him about to die, she put forth her tender limbs and climbed down by the stems of the roses till her feet embraced the cool herbs below.

As she went, great thorns had made wounds in hands and feet, so that ruby drops fell from them and mingled with the large tears of dew that hung on the grass edges that she trod.

She passed by terrace and lawn and bower, till she came to the baser courts and quadrangles where the service of the castle was done. The

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draw-well was at rest after its day's labour. In the two buckets, left standing for chance use during the night, water was wrinkling in the light of a grey moon. As she was crossing the open, a white hound came and lapped in one of the pails, drew out his head, and yawned with the water dripping off his jowl. Innygreth shivered, for he had not nosed her in passing, and she knew that this was the hound of death waiting till midnight should strike.

By the chapel's west front she passed down more steps, and, crossing the garth, saw a lantern, and two men working under its beams. She stayed then, and saw how with pick and spade they had made room enough in the ground for a man to lie. The mould, as they threw it out, fell over her bare feet. "The midnight brings rain!" said one of the diggers, looking up. And Innygreth turned hereabout and went swiftly, having looked into a living man's grave.

Then came she to the guard-house, passing between the two sentinels who stood there with crossed pikes. And at the door of her knight's cell she halted, waiting in patience; for she knew well the rules and the hours, and that

presently the jailer would come with wine and bread, the last which in this world Sir Percyn might ever eat. So leaning her ear to the door, she heard calm breathing within; and even in her present distress, had joy, thanking fate that had let her hold fast on a heart so noble as this.

Presently came the jailer, carrying the spare meal. He opened the door softly and set it down by the bed, sighing to himself that so fair a youth was presently to die, for all that knew Sir Percyn loved him.

Ye know well how where he had let one in he locked in two. She, indeed, sat down on the bed watching Sir Percyn's face; and, feeling the coldness of the prison walls striking into her, she took up her knight's cloak to lay over her shoulders, and covered up her feet with the rest of his garments that he had taken off ere he lay down.

Presently she heard the blessing of her own name breathed through his sleep, and at that leaned down her face into the hollow of his palm where it lay upon the coverlet, and kissed it as one kisses the relics of saints. In a while it closed softly upon her features, as a sensitive plant over the visiting bee whose honey it would

take, and a waking voice said, "Is it Innygreth that is here?"

"Even she and sorrow!" moaned the Princess, and laid her face against his.

"Oh, beloved," he said, "keep those dear eyes dry!" For thick tears traced over him from under her lids, and even then a spot of blood from her hand showed upon his as he reached up to stroke her face. Then he started, clasping her. "How art thou wounded, beloved," he cried, "if this is come from thee?"

She answered: "The roses by which thou camest to me, I climbed down to thee."

"Oh, blessed sad chance!" he cried, embracing her well, "for now mine eyes have seen the sweet colour of thy blood, shed out of dear veins for love of me!"

And as his arms clung round her in bitter sweet joy at that last meeting, he said: "Thou art cold, love, and trembling, for thy meek body is all but naked in this house of death where I am held captive!"

But Innygreth answered: "What does cold or pain matter any more? Now I am by thy side it matters not; and when thou art gone neither will it matter then. I have failed to win thy

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freedom or mine. I have failed in all but to dig thy grave where it lies, under the chapel wall by the light of this grey moon!"

"But," said he, "though I had failed in all, having gained thee I should be happier in my end than all who live not having known thy sweetness."

Thus these lovers, each unto each, the saddest, sweet things that hearts may make lips speak when parting comes to them. And the Princess took from him a lock of his hair, to have ever at her heart, when he was not there. And he said: "Beloved, hast thou it safe?"

"In my breast," said she.

But he: "Now thou wearest it, it is gone from my sight."

Then she said, musing sorrowfully: "Though I can come and go as I will, I have found no way for thee to escape; for this window is too narrow and these walls are too thick for thee to pass through, though by stealth I have brought thee file and rope, seeing that what I hold close to my own body shares my invisibility to the eyes of man."

And even while she spoke, they heard below the tread of heavy feet, and the clatter and ring

Blind Love

of steel arms; and by that the lovers knew that herewith came the guard to take Sir Percyn forth to the place of execution. Then, while yet the sound grew up the winding of the stairs, Innygreth compassed the full use that she might make of her charm: and before Sir Percyn knew what she would do, had slipped into the bed, folding herself round about him from head to foot. And with her lips to his face, winding her long hair over him: "Be quiet, thou dead man," spake she, "for now with my body I hold thee safe!"

And therewith those without, reaching the door, unlocked and threw it wide. And lo! a bed empty, and a cell void, as all eyes might plainly behold.

So straightway went out the cry that the prisoner was loose; and the guard, leaving the door wide, sped forth to search and stop all ways of exit from the castle.

Then Sir Percyn, lying hived in the warm breast of fair Innygreth, began to tremble at the very greatness of her mercy, and to be held so close in those dear arms. And spake he, twixt fear for his own frailty and worship for her divine charity: "Loose me, my Heaven, and

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let us go, for the door stands open!" "Nay," said she, "lie down, thou dear loon. For if we go forth together now, they will see thee, and thou wilt be taken. To-morrow the door will still be there, and we may get forth by some secret way, as I shall devise. But unless thou lie still, I cannot keep thee all hid, nor wrap thee safe from men's eyes. O my loon, my loon, I have taken thee up to me out of the grave; and this night I will hold my dead man safe!"

So in the morning, when the King, dreading whether the Princess had indeed escaped (for the Prince-suitor after long search had found her not), and hearing of the flight of Sir Percyn, came in great haste and dread to that cell: he saw, indeed, that fair youth lying asleep, and by his side a woman of most touching beauty, so sweet and pure and lovely an image of his own Queen's youth, that he doubted not it must verily be his own daughter.

And as he gazed, in bitter wrath for all of which that sight gave token, the two sleepers stirred and opened glad eyes each to each. Wit ye well King Agwisaunce heard much sweet speech and worship pass between the pair, ere

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the Princess with lifted gaze saw the King's eyes fixed on her, full of fury. And first she trembled and fluttered at the sight of his wrath, and threw her arms protectingly over her lover, to keep him still hidden from the King's eyes. But in a while, so new was the fixedness of his gaze, that she started up crying: "O my father, canst thou indeed see me at last?"

"Yes, wanton, I do see thee!" he answered. "A heavy sight it is. There thou liest with thy doomed paramour beside thee!"

Then Innygreth lifted herself, smiling, and said, "O father, since now thou seest me, my will is that for a wedding gift thou do give me this very Sir Percyn to wed and live with in happiness and honour to my life's end!"

Then the King remembered how he had given her his royal word; and as he had willed, so had it to be. Therefore is an end come to my story.

Now, had the King been as other men, and let the fairy's will be in the first place, none of these sorrows had to come about, nor need any have been wise concerning that thing, nor this have been written. Wherefore ye who like this tale be glad that the King erred not in faith to his wife; and ye that like it not, be grieved.

XVII: Lady into George Fox

MR. TURBECK was not happy in his mind. Only that day he had discovered that Mrs. Turbeck had not been baptised. This, in the wife of a country parson, who was also rural dean of the diocese, was a very unusual omission. It should, he felt, have been far easier for Mrs. Turbeck to have avoided scarletina, or measles, or even vaccination during infancy, than baptism.

When, as a Miss Fox, he had seen and fallen in love with her, and when later he had led her to the altar, it had never for a moment entered his head that the lady was not a complete Christian. Nor, indeed, had she then known it herself: he must give her that credit. His Georgina had not intentionally deceived him. On learning from her old nurse—who had come to her on an interested visit in expectation of an interesting event soon to take place—that she had unwittingly omitted this first duty of a Christian, she had come to her husband at once and told him of it.

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She had done so with that characteristic charm and lightness of manner which had always delighted him, making him feel rather more in love with her than, as a married man, a vicar, and a rural dean, he considered appropriate or desirable.

He was writing his second Sunday sermon, when Georgina put her head in at the door to say: "John dear, it's no good your writing that sermon for *me*; I've not been baptised."

"Nonsense, my love!" said John, not even laying down his pen. Then she came in, and sitting on his knee, told him the facts. And the facts so disturbed him that he not only laid down his pen, but left his sermon unfinished.

He was rather shocked to find that Mrs. Turbeck, having told him, was for leaving things as they were and remaining a heathen. She was going shopping; she asked for money. She was also going sick-visiting and tract-distributing: a mixed mission for the curing of germs and the spreading of them, which under his direction had become her daily practice.

"But, my dear," he expostulated, "can you distribute, ought you to distribute, Christian

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tracts till you have become one yourself?"—he meant, become a Christian.

"Well, but," replied his wife with a pretty wit, "you distribute bread and blankets at Christmas, without becoming a baker or a Shetland pony, or whatever it is that blankets are made from. Why not? I really don't see that it matters. *You* wrote the tracts; *I* didn't."

"It *must* matter," he said solemnly.

"Very well, then, let it!" And with a nod and a smile, as if to show that letting it matter was not going to make it matter to her, she went, leaving her spiritual crisis to him alone.

Mr. Turbeck did not consider that he had a narrow mind. He was "Broad" rather than "High"; in order to suit all tastes in his congregation he had been accustomed to take the eastward and the northerly position upon alternate Sundays, nor was he a keen defender of the Athanasian Creed. On the very few occasions when he caused it to be said in his church, he regarded it as a matter of discipline rather than of doctrine. But this—the unbaptised condition of his wife—he told himself really did matter. If the cook and the housemaid found out—and the nurse, in making conversa-

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tion, might so easily let it out—he was afraid that they would either give notice, feeling the place was not respectable, or pay less respect in future to their mistress than was necessary for the ordering of the house. Also they would certainly pass it on to the parish; and that would not do at all. He was quite certain that a clergyman of the Church of England could not run a parish knowingly with an unbaptised wife.

So when Mrs. Turbeck returned from her morning round, he told her what he had decided—that she must be baptised, and that without further delay.

Mrs. Turbeck thought differently. “I don’t feel like it!” she said. It was their first matrimonial difference.

“But you must,” he insisted. “People might find out.”

“How can they?” she said. “And why shouldn’t they? It makes no difference.”

That was a theological point he was not prepared to argue. Putting it on other grounds: “Your old nurse,” he said, “may go telling people—people to whom it does make a difference.”

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"She won't do that," declared Georgina; "she's far too ashamed of it. She only told *me* because she thought it would be bad for—well, you know, she's got a funny old notion in her head that anything born of heathen parentage may turn out black."

"I think that, in a spiritual sense, she is substantially right," said Mr. Turbeck.

"'Transubstantially' I should call it," said his wife. "Besides, if you baptise me, then people *will* know!"

"Oh, no," he replied comfortably. "We will go to the church just by our two selves, when it gets dark and do it after evensong."

Mrs. Turbeck stood considering; pretty, demure, and reluctant, very appealing, she stood and looked at him.

"John, do you really think it matters?" she asked.

He was sorry for her, but a strong sense of spiritual duty urged him on. "It matters to *me*," he said.

"Very well," she replied resignedly, "we won't quarrel about it. But I don't feel like it. It will be so cold!" she added.

"That can be easily remedied," replied Mr.

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Turbeck. "We will have it warm for you."

"How?"

"We will take the thermos along."

And so, after tea, they put into the thermos the hot water that was left over, and going out in the late dusk, through the garden, the back way to the churchyard, arrived at the church unperceived.

It was while they stood together in the porch, and while Mr. Turbeck was fitting the key into the lock, that the event happened which no doctrine can explain: psycho-analysis may. One can only suppose that Mrs. Turbeck had been the subject of a lifelong and violent repression, which the imminent threat of baptism now brought to a head.

Mr. Turbeck heard at his back a confused shuffling of feet, as though Georgina were changing her shoes, or taking them off, Mohammedan fashion, before entering the sacred enclosure. With a quick backward glance—but too late to witness the actual transformation—he discovered that his wife had turned unmistakably into a Quaker.

To one not merely a member, but a minister and a dignitary of the Episcopal Church, this

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must in any case have caused a severe shock; but its devastating nature was not limited to the sectarian change which had taken hold upon his wife, nor even to its exterior expression in that habit of dress worn by the Society of Friends in its most palmy days, before modern industrialism had robbed it of the sartorial accent which once gave it distinction. Mrs. Turbeck had not merely become a Quaker—she had become a Quaker of an extra large size and of a stern and unbending cast of countenance (Mr. Turbeck was even dimly aware that he knew the face, though not by personal acquaintance); and she was clad, in accordance with her newly acquired size and general air of authority, in the habiliments, not of a female of the species, but of a male. She was dressed in a foxy or snuff-brown, brown worsted stockings and black-buckled shoes. She wore a hat that had surely never been made in Paris, high in the crown, with a wide brim; and under it her hair hung short of her shoulders, but overlong for a man. Her face was, so to speak, smooth-shaven, but badly at that; and in the transformation she had parted from her youth, appearing now to be a man of forty-five, or there-

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abouts. In a word, as a country vicar's wife (however she might have passed for one in town) she looked and was impossible. Yet she was still, he felt in some strange way, the wife of his bosom; for there was recognition in her eyes—even a spark of mischief, turned to grim amusement in the austere aspect under which her identity had become sunk. The thought flashed, the hope—that this transformation, all its monstrous deformity, was but some clever trick, amateurish and theatrical, that she had played him, helped by the obscurity of the hour; and he was about to expostulate over the unseemliness of such conduct within the precincts of a church, and in the possible view of some of his parishioners, when his wife's own voice cut him short: "Steeplejack, see what thou hast done now!"

The nickname, spoken in a tone of authoritative disrespect for his ministerial office, gave a sharp jolt to his memory. He recalled an old seventeenth-century engraving, pock-marked with age, hanging in his wife's room, of her ancestor George Fox, founder of the Society of Friends: an ancestry of which, though probably only collateral, he now recalled that she had

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always been inordinately proud. He had now no doubt that it was the Quaker virus in her blood which had made her in the first instance oppose baptism, as a necessary means for regularising her position in the parish, and now a sudden rush of that same blood through her whole system had caused this ghastly and grotesque reversion to type for which in a country vicarage no place could possibly be found.

The position in which he thus found himself so cowed his spirit that his knees gave way under him, and he would have fallen to the ground had not his enlarged and masculine wife caught him in his arms.

That her fondness for him had not changed was found by the fact that she kissed him very tenderly upon both cheeks. But it was not a kiss that he relished, or could even be comfortable about. He felt that appearances were against it. British in his instincts, he did not like to be kissed by men; and while his wife continued to masquerade under so masculine an appearance, he could not but feel that such domestic endearments were out of place.

The kiss, however, was but a passing embarrassment; a far greater stood before him. No

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sooner had he collected his scattered wits than he cried: "But if you stay like this, what are we going to do?"

Mrs. Turbeck said that was not for them to decide. Light would be sent, and they must follow it.

Mr. Turbeck felt that, for the present, he greatly preferred darkness. And Providence appearing to be upon his side, they made their way back to the vicarage unperceived. There, arrived in his study, and with the door locked, he felt momentarily safe. Then, needing a restorative, he got out the whisky; and quite naturally thinking that under the circumstances she needed it as much as he, offered her a share. He found, however, that, in the skin of George Fox, his Georgina had become a teetotaller; and not only did she disapprove of it for herself, she disapproved of it for him. "Devil's jallopp" she called it, and emptied it forth from the window, bottle and all. With his inner man thus unfortified he went out and gave the astonished servants a month's holiday, explaining that an infectious disease had come into the house which he did not wish to spread farther. When they had gone, left with old Nanny alone, since

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she knew the origin of the trouble, he told her what had actually happened. The old woman had sufficient faith, or superstition, to regard the whole thing as credible; but was much exercised to know what was going to become of the future event. They went in and had a look at George Fox's counterfeit. Her new condition told them nothing definite about her old one. Stout and comfortable, she was sitting quite unperturbed, holding a retired meeting all by herself, and seemingly quite oblivious to what went on around her.

Regarding this as an unconscious state, Mr. Turbeck determined that bed was the proper place for her, hoping that a gentle purgative and a good night's rest would put her right by morning.

Georgina became quite passive to their direction; one at each arm they tenderly supported her upstairs, to a low accompaniment of quotations from scripture, which seemed to rumble out of her like echoes from the cave of an oracle. But when it came to undressing her she resolutely refused; in fact when, in spite of her holy protests, they attempted to do so not a button could they undo. It seemed as though the

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transformation was all of a piece, and that her identification was not with George Fox and the man natural or spiritual, but only with his simulacrum, a clothed parable, a presentation of him as seen by men—as seen also by Georgina in the engraved portrait of him that hung in her room. And so presently Mr. Turbeck had the terrific experience of seeing his wife get into bed, not merely in all her clothes—and those a man's—but with hat and shoes as well; and the image she there presented was so alarming that though he tried he could not bring himself to sleep beside her. He had a fear (as he had told the servants) that an infectious disease had entered the house; and that, if he allowed himself a too close contact, he might wake up the next morning and find himself changed into Elizabeth Fry. And as that (though in a way it might bring him nearer to his beloved wife) would mean that he would have to resign his living, he felt that he could not afford so perilous an experiment.

And so all night he sat in a chair and dozed, and heard his dear Georgina snoring through the nose and throat of George Fox—indication of a fact, nowhere recorded in history, that the

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founder of the Society of Friends had been subject to adenoids.

In the morning he had another and even more terrific experience—the sight of his dear wife, with his own razor, shaving off a two days' growth of beard, and doing it as to the manner born.

Leaving her so employed, he stole downstairs and consulted old Nanny as to what was best to do. It was agreed that no one must be admitted, and that all inquirers should be told that there was an infectious disease in the house. But in that case it would also be necessary to send for the doctor; and if so the doctor must be told. But what?

Mr. Turbeck felt quite convinced that the doctor would not believe him. And how best to bring him in any degree toward a speculative acceptance of the impossible was the problem. His chosen solution gave Nanny a strenuous day's work. Having ordered the letting out of a complete set of his wife's over and under garments, toward evening he went upstairs to prepare Georgina for the necessary induction. She was sitting very quietly as she had done

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throughout the day, holding a retired meeting all by herself.

When he told her that the doctor was coming to see her she paid no attention, seemed even not to have heard him. Rapt away in the spirit, she had become indifferent to outside things. Considering that this condition afforded a favourable opportunity for the experiment, he called up Nanny, who came, bringing the clothes with her, and within a quarter of an hour the unresisting George Fox had been clothed, outwardly enveloped, that is to say, over and above his own proper habiliments in the finest pleated and lace-trimmed linen, and one of the modestly fashioned costumes which Georgina customarily wore when she specially wished to look nice.

She did not exactly look nice now; the superimposed covering of womanly convention did not sit well upon the convention of Quakerism which it was designed to hide. In the double costume her bulk became enormous and her figure extraordinarily nondescript. No coming happy event could sufficiently account for it. But though it could not deceive the doctor, it might at least startle him into paying

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more attention to the incredible story he would have to hear: the monstrous sight would help to convince him that something extraordinary really had happened.

When he arrived Mr. Turbeck took him for a preliminary interview into his study and stated the facts. The doctor immediately regarded him as his patient rather than Mrs. Turbeck. But merely saying, "Wait till you have seen her," the Vicar led the doctor upstairs to his wife's room.

As they ascended they heard a confused noise going on, accompanied by lamentable exclamations from old Nanny; and, entering, they found the no longer captivated form of George Fox rending the bonds of its prison-house into such rags and tatters as left no semblance to the eye of the femininity they had once stood for. An undisguised, uncompromising figure of Quakerism, and unmistakably a male of the species stood before them.

Nevertheless Mr. Turbeck said the necessary and courageous thing. "This is my wife; see if you can cure her."

Georgina was no longer holding retired meeting. She began to preach: and paying no

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attention to the interchange of question and answer, and subsequent discussion which went on around her, preached uninterruptedly for three hours.

The doctor had then taken his departure, refusing to deal with a case which lay so completely outside the range of his professional experience. With the usual incredulity of a man of science he could not accept as fact a phenomenon which made the generality of hitherto accepted facts so exceedingly doubtful as to leave science with no future firm leg to stand upon. He would not even promise to observe professional secrecy; it might, he said, be his duty to inform the police—though of what to inform them he probably did not know.

Thus, with no remedy upon the medical side, the vicarage remained shut up and isolated. And people who came to inquire were told that Mrs. Turbeck was suffering from a mysterious and infectious disease, and was being treated for it, not by the local doctor, but by a specialist from London.

Thus Mr. Turbeck, as the clergy always do when in a tight place, temporised with appearances, hoping that something providential

would happen. All through the next day Georgina had repeated motions of the spirit; she again went to bed in her clothes, but on rising did not shave. Mr. Turbeck perceived, however, that she needed it, and the slight hope the omission had at first inspired died the death. Evidently it had not been the habit of her ancestor George Fox to shave frequently or regularly; she merely took after him.

It was not till the third day of their enforced incarceration that Mr. Turbeck conceived the notion of privately baptising her. That, he thought, since no other way offered, might be sufficient to exorcise the Quaker element which had taken possession of her. Not wishing to alarm her by the necessary preliminaries, he prepared the wherewithal according to the prescribed ritual, and going to the chamber she occupied took her gently by the hand and led her down to the room where Christianity awaited her. But as a dog scents mischief from afar, or as a cat discovers it even under the blandishing endearments of its would-be captors, no sooner had he opened the door than Georgina broke away from him, and running out into the garden jumped the wall into the churchyard,

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and thence made her escape into the parish, where work for the Lord was waiting for her.

That night she preached outside the public-house to such effect that its outraged habitués took her down to the pond and ducked her. Then they hung a dead cat round her neck, tied an old tin kettle to her coat-tail and drummed her out of the village.

All that night and the day following Mr. Turbeck went far and wide seeking her. The first definite news he received of her whereabouts was from a police officer on patrol. He, dismounting from his bicycle, gave word of a person answering to her description who had that day been up before the magistrate for causing a riotous crowd to assemble, and was now doing her fortnight's sentence in the local jail.

Mr. Turbeck, feeling that there for the present his wife was safe, went off to see his Bishop, and lay the whole case before him. He had not much more hope of convincing the Bishop than of convincing his doctor, for though bishops are not such men of science as medical practitioners, they are socially more conventional, and it might be just as hard from the social as from the scientific point of view to

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convince an official mind that a small parish vicar's wife could by any possibility, earthly, diabolical, or divine, have become changed instantaneously into the similitude of a seventeenth-century worthy, 6 ft. in height, George Fox by name, founder of the Society of Friends.

To his astonishment, however, his Bishop, good holy man, readily believed him, though admitting the difficulty. "Only a week ago," he said, "I would not have done so, but providentially I have lately been reading a book of biography entitled *Lady into Fox*, from which I am informed that a very similar thing happened quite within living memory. And I can see no intrinsic reason why, if a lady, the wife of a layman, can be changed into a fox, another lady, the wife of a cleric, cannot be changed into a Quaker, and even—though the circumstance presents difficulties into a male Quaker. I will admit that when first reading the book I have mentioned I was inclined to regard it as an ingenious *jeu d'esprit*, a work merely of fiction. But not only, as I studied it more attentively, did the book bear upon it the stamp of truth, but I have also a friend, a Mr. G. K. Chesterton, who assures me from personal

knowledge that things of this sort do often happen. He has himself written a play called "Magic" in order to prove it; and the Bishop of London told me that he had seen and was greatly impressed by it. Mr. Chesterton maintains that until we do whole-heartedly admit that such things can happen, do happen, and—under God's providence—ought to happen, Christian faith will again never be what it once was in the Middle Ages. "I regard it, therefore, as my Christian duty to try to believe everything that is told me that seems to be of a *bona fide* mediæval character. And your account, my dear Mr. Rural Dean, certainly appears to come under that category.

"And now tell me what steps you have taken to rescue your poor wife from the spiritual abyss into which she has fallen?"

Mr. Turbeck gave a full account of the bedding, the clothing, the calling in of the doctor, and his subsequent frustrated attempt to administer private baptism.

"I think privacy was from the very first a mistake," said the Bishop. "I feel that this would not have happened had you called your parish together in the first instance; and ad-

ministered public baptism as the rubric prescribes, in the presence of a Christian congregation. I hold still that baptism is the solution.”

“Your immediate task, therefore, is to recover possession of your wife’s person (impersonation, or alias, would perhaps be the true word for it) on her release from prison, and then—if you have a delicacy yourself—if you will bring her to me, I shall be delighted.”

Accepting the advice of his spiritual superior, Mr. Turbeck went home, and a fortnight later returned to the cathedral city in which the county jail was situated, in order to meet his wife on her release, and take her forthwith to the Bishop for the necessary treatment.

But, as ill-luck would have it, Mr. Turbeck was under the impression that prisons did as work-houses do, not releasing their inmates till the hour of noon. Whereas in the case of prisons the regulation hour is 8 a.m. For this reason Mrs. Turbeck had been turned out of prison about four hours before he arrived.

It also happened, by a further stroke of ill-luck, that a diocesan retreat for clergy was just then being held at the cathedral, which was quite near; and, as the hour of Mrs. Turbeck’s release from prison synchronised with the rec-

recreation hour of the clergy in retreat, they were all playing bat and ball together in the cathedral close when Georgina in Quaker dress, and equally in Quaker spirit, appeared in sight.

Confronted with the spectacle of nearly forty clergymen playing at ball in the precincts of the cathedral, and without knowing the special circumstances which justified it, Georgina began denouncing them in unsparing language, language more suitable to the seventeenth century than to ours; and the Bishop, hearing the commotion, came out from his palace to see what was the matter.

Now, no sooner did he set eyes on that stern shape of unorthodox divinity, than he knew what matter was to hand and the remedy for it. But when he called on his faithful clergy to catch the woman, and bring her to the baptistry, they—many of them young and still high-spirited youths—believing their Bishop to be merry and playing a game—became merry and played the game likewise. And soon, fervour being uppermost and the herd-instinct strong in them, and in that place mediævalism only waiting its opportunity to revive and grow strong—is not a similar thing told of in Mr. Walter Pater's memoir of Gaston de Latour?—

they were presently baiting the Quaker as man sent from God, driving him from point to point, and from pillar to post, even as strenuously as did monks and theologians of old with Jews, Turks, heretics, scientists, or schismatics; nor could the Bishop, shouting with all his might, and beating them over their backs with his episcopal staff, induce them to desist or do differently. And this was the situation when Mr. Turbeck, coming upon the scene on the way to the jail, saw his dear wife Georgina being beaten and hustled by half the young curates of the diocese, and the Bishop, apparently by his gesticulations, hounding them on.

It was then that Mr. Turbeck saw red. Snatching the Bishop's crozier from his hand, he began to pursue the curates this way and that, in a blind fury; and to deal devastating blows upon skulls which, however dense—unable to withstand the weight of so holy and mediæval an instrument—cracked like nuts.

He did not wait to count his slain, nor did the Bishop. He, good holy man, running to fetch water and blessing it as he sped, did the deed which had it come a little earlier might have kept many a curacy unvacated, and Mr. Tur-

beck, his hands unstained by blood, in the full enjoyment of his country living to the end of his natural days.

But when holy water and crozier had done their work, there lying upon the beautifully shorn grass of the cathedral close, lay no fewer than fifteen young and once promising curates, whose spiritual retreat by such unforeseen mischance had now become permanent; and in their midst lay a very curious figure quite as dead as all the rest—the figure of a woman small and delicate, loosely encased in the rough garb of a seventeenth-century Quaker.

It was a sad satisfaction to poor Mr. Turbeck, surrounded by his other dead, to see that he had got his dear wife back again, even though the event had made him a widower. The spirit of her Quaker ancestor had been effectually exorcised; and she was buried in Church of England ground with all the accompaniments which are the due of a complete and baptised Christian.

Mr. Turbeck still lives at Broadmoor, where, as acting chaplain, he is quite happy and very much interested in the cases (so far less remarkable than his own) among which he has to minister.

XVIII: A Side-wind

THE Prime Minister of Jingalo was majestically making his way one morning across the parks of the metropolis, receiving at intervals, as one to the manner born, the obsequious salutes of its free and independent citizens, when, on a sudden, a frisky gust of wind lifted from his pondering brain its shiny covering, and with a preliminary cast of elliptical grace sent it trundling at a lively speed in a direction wholly uncondusive to the gathering of Cabinet Ministers which was then awaiting him.

The Prime Minister, with an instinctive consciousness of what became the dignity of one so highly placed in the Councils of the Nation, looked around for some representative of the proletariat to relieve him from a position of unseemly embarrassment; but recognisers of his high official position were not at that moment in evidence. A nurse-maid propelling a perambulator halted and stared, sorry that so fine a

hat should have behind it one so faint in pursuing; while a little farther off two sportive urchins, of a class too comfortable to run for coppers, saw one corner of the social problem presenting itself before their eyes in a form they could understand and appreciate, and with the instinctive inaction of budding statesmanship stood to watch the *dénouement*.

So far it was an affair of moments only; but the spring wind had franchise in its blood, and was as inconsiderate of ministerial dignity as those whom this story leaves nameless; the pathway also, with a like inconsiderateness, happened to be of gravel, and every moment that passed the hat, as it pursued its involuntary career, was deteriorating in value. Conscious that he must at least wear it to the Cabinet meeting, for which he was already late, the Prime Minister turned and stepped after it.

It seemed as though the hat had eyes; no sooner did its lordly owner advance towards it than the sleek black slave rose upon its rim and fled. Years of power and the leadership of a great party had made running a thing outside the Prime Minister's constitution: he pulled up abruptly, and shouting "Hi, boy!" to the dis-

A Side-wind

tant urchins, held up a florin, hoping that for so large a bribe heart of grace might be found in one of them.

But the distance was too great for the coin to give information of its value. He heard the boys laugh, for the bald head of the elderly invites no pity unless it is bowed; and to those who are obviously portly only from prosperity, the heart of youth is adamant. Breathing a prayer to Heaven for the preservation of his incognito from the predatory gaze of the half-penny Press-mongers, he took in breath and began ponderously to run—if, that is to say, the will may be taken for the deed. In other words, he broke into a trot, and saw with satisfaction the sidling hat cower down against the kerb, as though awed into submission by so sudden a display of resolution in its rightful owner.

The unaccustomed motion stirred memories. When had he run last? Certainly not since he had become Prime Minister; no—he must go back, much farther than that—not since, in the days of his first courtship, he had run upstairs three steps at a time to the room where Lady Euphemia was expecting him, in order to tell her that he was included, not merely in the new

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ministry then forming, but in the Cabinet. And he remembered how then Euphemia, instead of throwing her arms about him in rapturous delight, as he had expected her to do, had coldly inquired whether a certain reform often discussed between them—a reform toward which for personal reasons his academic adhesion had warmed into eloquent advocacy—whether, to his knowledge, that reform was to be included in the coming Government's programme; and, if not, what was he going to do? And her meaning, as to what he ought to do, was quite obvious, even before she put it into words.

Now when a man, and above all a politician, has by a big stride set foot on one of the highest rungs of the ladder of fame, only to hear himself calmly told by the lady of his choice to get off it again—and that over a mere question of tactics, which she chooses to regard as principle—he is very justly annoyed. It makes him think—it made the future Prime Minister of Jingalo think—that a woman, even an intellectual woman like Euphemia—does not understand politics. So when Euphemia, having heard to the end a tale, which included among

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its incidents a hurried visit to his tailor for the ordering of the ministerial uniform, put to him the utterly chilling question "And when are you going to resign?" he, who up till now had laid all his ambitions at her feet to be shared and approved—not to be criticised—was (who would not be?) very justly annoyed.

Euphemia had grey eyes, and there was at times a look in them which hitherto he had regarded as divine. He was conscious now of that look directed upon him with a new meaning; and whereas on previous occasions he had interpreted it as a divining of his inmost thoughts and aspirations, it now seemed to him inquisitorial. The suspicion flushed him; he spoke angrily. "I have no intention," he said, "of making myself so supremely ridiculous!"

Euphemia's answer conveyed an assumption of superior wisdom which made him almost loathe her on the spot.

"To do the straightforward thing," she said, "people sometimes have to make themselves appear ridiculous. I am sorry you haven't the courage."

As a result of that interview he lost his Euphemia; and with all the force of a resolute

will had tried not to regret it. Euphemia had endeavoured to use her sex-influence in politics; and to prove to himself his independence as a man and his honour as a politician, he had married somebody else with much more money than Euphemia, and with more social influence; and by all his friends and acquaintances, his wife included, was considered not to have done badly.

That was fifteen years ago.

The question in which Euphemia was interested was still excluded from the sphere of practical politics, and Euphemia had begun going to prison for it. As for himself, here was he now, the Prime Minister of a country of great commercial importance, compelled by circumstances over which he had no control to run after his own hat! Euphemia's words returned with strange distinctness to his memory, "To do the straightforward thing people sometimes have to make themselves appear ridiculous. I am sorry you haven't the courage." That unjust statement seemed to be finding its illustration in his present dilemma. Euphemia, who lately had been troubling him politically, should in this personal matter, at least, be refuted. "I

have!" he exclaimed internally, and with defiant resolution put on the pace.

At this point his meditations—for the wind was high and the pursuit was taking time—were abruptly broken by the sound of heavy running behind him. With an eager halloo there passed him a gentleman portly like himself, arrayed, as he himself had been till fate divided them, in the top-hat and frock-coat of respectability; but these were, as half a glance disclosed, of a seedy and threadbare character. The man was evidently one who lived precariously, clinging desperately to outworn symbols of gentility. Doubtless he had descried the florin rejected by the callous urchins, and, with the prospect of an easier and more profitable job than that of the average cab-runner, had thrown his dignity to the winds, and was now committed to the ridiculous and degrading task of chivvyng another man's hat for him. Contented that it should be so, the Prime Minister relinquished the chase, and saw, not without amusement, the hat make its final spurt for liberty as with an elephantine amble its would-be captor closed in on it. But in another moment his sense of comedy was changed into amazed

indignation, for no sooner had the man become seized of his quarry than, effecting a quick transfer, he set it upon his own head, casting down in its place the dilapidated article which had previously reigned there. Then, without one word of explanation, without even a backward glance to judge of ulterior effects, he spun off at increased speed across the greensward by the shortest possible cut to the park boundaries.

For the first time since his arrival in office the Prime Minister saw himself ignored; and the shock of that outrage so disturbed his sense of security that instinctively he clapped hands to that most treasured part of his person where a man hangs his jewellery, to discover whether watch and chain had not gone also. And meanwhile, far ahead of him, ran crime unpunished—so far that his hat was already becoming an insignificant spot upon the landscape.

The thief, though he had secured a good start, was portly and out of condition, and ran slow; and wrath and all the instincts of a free citizen defrauded of his rights prompted the Prime Minister to pursue. But a sense of his dignity, a sense also of the reporters of the half-penny Press, on which that dignity so largely

depended, held him back. He could not afford, even in defence of his rights, to make himself ridiculous. There was no need: in the nick of time Providence came to his rescue. The sportive instinct of the two urchins, which had previously been against him, now veered around to his support. They had sided with the hat in its bid for liberty; but they could not side with highway robbery. And there temptingly ahead of them, far off but still catchable, ran the thief.

With a view-halloo that echoed across the park to the policeman stationary at the gates, they clapped heels and were after him. Against the fleet rush of those young limbs pursuing for the mere joy of it, the shabby genteel one's chances of escape were soon reduced to a nullity; his start of a hundred yards was in twelve seconds brought down to sixty; he heard his pursuers, glanced back and losing his presence of mind zigzagged, and broke away on a fresh course.

That did for him. The boys, striking off the corner of the triangle, began to overhaul him with ease.

Keeping at a distance, meanwhile, the Prime

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Minister followed the chase with a confident resumption of dignity. The boys, it was plain, did not know him, nor did the nursery-maid; the whole ridiculous incident would therefore remain anonymous. Diving a hand down into his well-filled pocket, he took hold once more upon the florin; and now that only a few yards separated the pursuers from their prey, he gave the coin a gay twirl, blithe to part with it to a pair who had so well earned it. Splendid fellows, after all, boys were!—they had their faults, of course—their hide-bound prejudices, their callousness to the woes of others (the ghostly Euphemia here put in a constitutional word, and was straightway bidden to retire). But the country could not come to much harm whose young and budding citizens, with no physical force to speak of, were thus prepared to tackle without hesitation a burly and desperate—

At that moment the burly and desperate what-you-may-call-him, seeing that his game was up, halted, threw up his hands, clawed off the purloined hat, and with a despairing howl sat upon it.

The boys fell upon him with delighted pum-

mellings, their attentions for the moment fully occupied in sweet revenge.

Meanwhile a crowd was beginning to be attracted to the fray: among them the appalled Prime Minister beheld a policeman; and behind the policeman he saw in imagination the halfpenny Press and its reporters.

He too halted, cast about him a cursory glance, weighed his chances, then without more ado turned tail and ran. The boys must go without their florin, the crime unpunished, the halfpenny Press without its information: at all costs the story of that pancake hat must not become attached to the person of a Prime Minister: he could not afford to make himself ridiculous.

He had but to run twenty yards; a group of trees providentially placed received him within their shelter. He paused to recover breath.

And as he paused, and with an eye free from panic began once more to take in his surroundings, whom should he meet but Euphemia—Euphemia whose expression of countenance at once informed him that she had been an understanding observer of the whole proceeding!

She gazed at him with those strange grey

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eyes of hers, but no longer as one who claimed a personal acquaintance, only as recognising a political opponent. And actually, she was going to speak to him!—"When are you going to give women—"

Luck had brought him to the skirts of the main thoroughfare: he hailed a passing cab, jumped into it and drove away.

He was free: free from the inquiries of the police, free from the reporters, free from the halfpenny Press, free from the persecuting interrogations of a lady-politician. But a word of Euphemia's—not her last one—still stuck in his brain: "To do the straightforward thing people sometimes have to make themselves appear ridiculous. You haven't the courage." And the conviction came home to him, that without any courage at all, not in the doing, but in the avoidance of doing the straightforward thing, he had hit the mark he so wished to avoid; no, had not merely "appeared," but had been ridiculous. But after all—he drew a relieved breath—it was only Euphemia who had seen him, only Euphemia, that is to say, who *knew*, and Euphemia, even when you had told the worst of her, was a woman of feminist prin-

ciple. She was, that is to say, not merely a lady, but a "gentleman."

It was a great comfort to him to feel that, in spite of their political warfare, he could depend upon it that she would not abate one iota of her self-respect, even for the sake of making him ridiculous.

And so, though morally the victory was Euphemia's, it really did not count; until, later in the day, a police-court emissary called at his official residence to inquire—he had quite forgotten that his name was in it—whether the hat was his.

But Jingalo has an unwritten constitution: and the Prime Ministers are never subpoenaed to give evidence in police-court cases against their will.



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